ABBOTS THORPE.

VOL. II.

ABBOTS THORPE;

OR,

THE TWO WILLS.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

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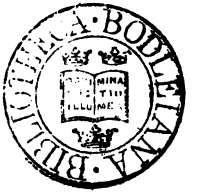

ABBOTS THORPE.

CHAPTER XX.

MANY hours passed away before Meta could recover from her perturbed feelings after Lord Lilsdale's departure. Fortunately, Mrs. Mortimer kept her room as a prevention to the cold she was always expecting. Mrs. Mortimer was a lady of the old school; she belonged to a past generation, and with the exception of Meta, had very little sympathy for the persons or "times" of the present day. She was prosy, given to command, and exercise that kind of authority school-mistresses assume with their scholastic duties, and which they can never afterwards throw aside. Not that Mrs. Mortimer remembered the fact of having kept a school, it had died within her long ago, leaving her to realise fully that she was the widow of a brave colonel, and as such, claimed the suffrages of mankind generally.

Meta bathed her face in cold water, and then paid Mrs. Mortimer a visit in her bed-room. The old lady was curious to know all about Lord Lilsdale's visit, why he went so soon, and when he would come again.

Meta patiently answered every question, and then asked Mrs. Mortimer if she could spare her for a few hours, as she wished to sketch at "the cave."

"Certainly, my love; I have my knitting and tent-stitch, so I can amuse myself until you return. But Lord Lilsdale! only think of his going on the Continent! Why, I thought he was going to marry—marry——" Meta stopped the words from coming with a good-bye kiss, and left the room quickly.

Mrs. Mortimer's principal mental diet now was the thought of her dear Meta being Lady Lilsdale. She lived upon the idea, and had fed so long upon it, that it had become a certainty in her own mind. Meta's largess, as Lady Lilsdale, Meta, the presiding genius of Ashlee Court, and the wife of a prime minister, with Mrs. Mortimer always at her side to advise, were the "thick coming fancies" upon which she built a charming castle in the air.

Meta sought refuge from Mrs. Mortimer and her own thoughts in her sketch-book. Nature is often a solacing friend to a mind disturbed. But is it not strange we cannot enjoy the works of creation without occupation? The sketch-book, the rod, the gun, must be our companions. Why? May it not be that in nature there is a fulness of Deity which overwhelms our senses, and makes us seek relief in the work of our own hands? The "great voice" may be heard too loudly, perhaps, and we seek to "hide" ourselves from it amidst trees of our own planting! Mankind is ever the same at the core, whatever the crusts of succeeding generations may make him

outwardly—Adam and Eve ever—only nakedness is covered with the fig leaves of conventionality!

One day, nearly twelve months after Meta's rejection of Lord Lilsdale, she passed the Rymers' cottage, on her way to sketch a lovely peep of the winding river. "I will call at the Rymers on my return; it is so long since I had a chat; they may have heard, too, of or from Hugh." Meta breathed a sigh; hope deferred had begun to work its natural effects. The sketch completed, she retraced her steps to the Rymers' cottage.

"We saw you pass, Miss Raycliffe, I and my Nancy," said Thomas, who was seated with his wife, and reading a history of the battle of Waterloo, upon the bench beneath the casemented kitchen and parlour window, for it combined both humble attributes in one. After all, many poor people are well off—no taxes, and above all, no servants, and nice snug cottages to live in. The Rymers' cosy abode might suggest this thought, but we must go to the crowded allies of our large towns to learn what the poor have to suffer. The Rymers had every comfort in a homely way. A clock, two chests of drawers, fine tea trays, best tea service, a capital bed, and—prize of a thrifty, humble Yorkshire woman's heart—a pair of fine linen sheets, to be kept inviolate for that day which must alike come to rich and poor. Thomas sat half the day under the shade of his tall hollyhocks, with his canary chirping merrily above his head, and a hive, with bees buzzing, opposite. Within was a purring cat, whose vocation seemed to be, to rub herself with a very erect tail against your legs,

and a small dog of doubtful breed, which had long ago demonstrated the truth of the saying, that "it requires breed to stand corn," by becoming lazy, fat, ill-tempered, and impudent. Thomas and Nancy rather enjoyed Crisp's bad humour. His snarls with the cat relieved the monotony of that conjugal accord which the great Johnson pronounced so "desperately slow." Nancy came to the door, fresh, clean, and good-tempered as ever, to welcome Meta. They were delighted to see her, and Meta settled down in their snug kitchen for an hour's chat.

"Why, Nancy, what are you going to do with this?" asked Meta, taking up the unfinished sleeve of a black silk dress. "I thought you always wore prints and stuffs, like I do."

Nancy coloured. Thomas hobbled to the rescue. He took up the sleeve, rustled the silk with pride to show its richness, and said, "Ay, ay; we've managed it at last, haven't we, Nancy? I promised her a silk dress five years ago last Michaelmas, and here it is, a beauty, and there's a bonnet and a shawl too."

"Come, come, master, don't tell of me only, tell of yourself also; where's them new clothes, and that beaver hat of yours?" asked Nancy; "you must let Miss Raycliffe pass her opinion on them."

"But what is all this finery for? a wedding, a journey, or a christening?" asked Meta.

"A journey," whispered Thomas, as if it were too wonderful to be uttered aloud. "Nancy and I are going to London. There now, we are, surely, God and our health permitting."

"To London! What will you do in London, alone?"

"Oh, very well! You see we've laid by a bit of money, and we intend to enjoy it. Nancy has never seen a grander town than Leeds. You were once there, Nancy?"

"At Leeds! Oh yes, dirty hole! Surely London will be different to that; I expect to see grand sights there."

"Yes! t' Queen, Lords and Commons, red velvet, and fur, with black ends all over it—ay, old woman?" asked Thomas, chucking her under the chin, with as much pride as if she had been his bride of a week old.

"Well, ermine, velvet, and coaches full of glass, I take it, are common enough in London, Miss Raycliffe," said Nancy, seriously.

Meta laughed, and replied that Nancy knew as much about London as she did, never having been there. "How I should like to go with you!"

Meta's thoughts had flown to Hugh, and she looked almost enviously at Nancy because she would speak to him, see him, and hear his voice, whilst she could not so much as receive a single line from him.

"When do you go?" she inquired.

"Oh, bless you, not yet a while; t' weather must be finer, warmer, more settled like, before we stir," replied Thomas, with a spirit of procrastination, engendered by a love of home, and the dread of entering upon so extraordinary an undertaking.

"Oh, then I shall see you before you go; you must drink tea with Matthew and Bridget before you

leave; they will never forgive you if you go to London without saying good-bye."

"And to take any message from you to our dear Master Hugh. I shall have to seek London over to find him. It is passing strange I have never had a line. So unlike him to forget us all! May I make bold to ask, Miss Raycliffe, if you have heard from him?"

The tears nearly started to Meta's eyes; she drove them back, and excused Hugh's silence by saying that he would not write until he could rejoice their hearts with an account of his success.

"I cannot help thinking, though, there's something strange in it—and wrong too," added Thomas. "That rapscallion, slippery snake, Mr. Trapps, is very thick at the post-office; and folks do say—whisper like—that post-mistress Banks and her canting daughter are not quite—quite so good as they should be," said Thomas, cautiously. "But the evil will out some day, or my name isn't Thomas Rymer."

"And to think of them wicked Glenmores, Miss Raycliffe!" suggested Nancy. "Ay, at last their doings at Abbots Thorpe have come to an end; Glenmores, and all their rubbish, left last week for London. The house is shut up—all gone except Mr. Trapps and a few servants. Trapps is left behind, to settle matters for them; and I hear he looks woefully pale and done-up like."

"Ah, yes! I heard there had been some fright, and unpleasant consequences, the night of their ball," said Meta; "do you know the particulars?"

"Well, it's all over the place that Abbots Thorpe

is haunted by t' spirit of the late squire, and that t' night of t' grand masquerade, when they all dressed up like kings and queens, and wicked folks—such as bloody Mary, Napoleon, and——" Thomas's historical knowledge could go no farther. "Well, they were dancing like mad, and feasting—summut after the fashion of Belshazzar's feast, you know—when suddenly t'ould squire appeared in their midst. He walked through the house as if looking for something; and when he saw Trapps, folks say he looked at him and raised his hand to him in the most awful manner conceivable. They were all done for! —wenches screamed, fine folks fainted, and Trapps, in his terror, called out about something he had not destroyed. He meant the Will, of course, for he stole it, sure as a gun; no one but himself could get at the squire's papers."

"Ay, ay; murder will out," said Nancy. "Ill luck will follow them Glenmores wherever they go. No bairns, no love, no comfort for them in that big castle. Ill-gotten wealth brings nought but misery!"

"I am sorry too," said Thomas, "for young Mrs. Harcourt, pretty creature! And so kind and affable like to the poor! Every one pities her, ay, and loves her too, poor young thing."

"Couldn't you take to her, Miss Raycliffe? It might have a fine effect upon her soul, and do her a power of good," asked Nancy, who always turned up the whites of her eyes, and looked truly pious, when she touched upon spiritualities. "Bless me," she added, "I shudder when I think of where such likes go!"

"Mr. Leslie would have a much 'finer effect' than myself," replied Meta, amused at Nancy's expression; "he visits at Abbots Thorpe occasionally, and preaches every Sunday. Surely my services are not required; besides, Nancy, I cannot talk religion, but only try to practise it."

The subject was turned; Meta chatted a little longer, and then bent her steps homewards, full of painful thought. On her way home she had to pass the post-office. As she approached, she perceived Mr. Trapps at the door, in earnest conversation with Mrs. Banks, who, when he saw her, descended the steps and took the nearest cut through the fields to Abbots Thorpe.

"Good day, Mrs. Banks, I was just going to call upon you. I wish to ask you a few questions respecting the postal arrangements connected with your office."

"Oh yes! certainly—pray do! Walk in, Miss Raycliffe," stammered Mrs. Banks, looking, Meta thought, rather whiter than usual.

"Mrs. Banks, you are careless in your office; I have not received letters which have been sent to me. I warn you," said Meta, sternly, "if there is any more tampering with them I shall write and report you to the authorities. My letters generally come to me open, or in such a condition that I am certain they have been read. How is this? I require an explanation." Meta asked the question with true Raycliffe spirit, and a glance of her clear hazel eye, which, Mrs. Banks afterwards affirmed, penetrated to her very back-bone.

"What can Miss Raycliffe mean? Surely this is not like you, to suspect and threaten me — I who have managed this office for twenty years and more!"

"How dare you threaten mother?" asked the thin virago, Miss Banks, who now came forward with ruffled plumage.

"I neither suspect nor threaten, but state a fact, and warn you both. Good day."

Meta left the office, and did not see Mrs. Banks's fat, red hand raised in menace behind her back.

Could it be that Hugh had written and his letters had been purloined by the Bankses and Mr. Trapps? She had no doubt upon the subject. It was currently reported that Trapps was about to marry Miss Banks, and a bright pair the gossips said they would make.

During the last two years the Bankses had fallen very low in the estimation of their neighbours. There were many curious circumstances connected with them, and report even went so far as to affirm that they tampered with letters, and had even extracted money. Mr. Trapps, too, was extremely intimate, and possessed great influence over both mother and daughter—a fact which did not improve their reputation.

Meta was out of sight before Mr. Trapps, who had hid himself behind a wall, cautiously emerged, like some reptile from its lair, and returned to the post-office.

It was a small cottage, approached by a neat garden. One side of the cottage had been converted

into a shop, and was filled with a heterogeneous stock of tea, coffee, tobacco, flour, shoes, calico, and articles of men's attire. The tea was vile, and the coffee *viler;* but they managed to sell it to the country people because there was no other shop within five miles. Mrs. Banks was a fat, red-faced, overbearing woman, who knew the history of every one in Abbots Thorpe, and was not over particular in her mode of imparting her information. Her daughter, Miss Banks, was thin, and religiously inclined. She had offered her services to Mr. Leslie as a teacher in his school and singer in his choir; but as he soon discovered the calibre of the Bankses, and valued the peace of his school and parish, he found a pretext for dispensing with her services. Miss Martha Banks took herself off in high dudgeon, and declared enmity against Mr. Leslie, carrying her bad heart and hypocritical visage across to the newly-erected village Bethesda. Three years ago Mr. Trapps had discovered the dishonesty of the Bankses, and determined to use his knowledge for certain wicked purposes of his own. The day he found out their secret he was in high glee; he rubbed his hard, bony hands together, chuckled in quiet glee, smoothed his lank hair closer to his misshapen head, and dressed himself (as was his usual custom when bent upon evil) with more scrupulous care in a broader, whiter neck cravat. Oh, there are no rough edges upon you, Mr. Trapps! You are smooth, straight, and slippery enough to wriggle, snake-like, out of all manner of uncleanness without detriment to your outward man. His toilet completed, he set out

to drink tea with his friends the Bankses. He managed affairs cleverly, and informed mother and daughter of his discovery quite in a jocose style, treated it as a capital joke, a clever dodge, but with a warning finger raised, and a look which plainly said, "Take care now, for you are in the power of Mr. Trapps."

That was sufficient for one evening; Mr. Trapps was never impatient for results, but could always wait till morning—"bide his time."

A fortnight passed. Mr. Trapps then spent another evening with the Bankses, and upon that occasion dictated the terms upon which they might count upon his secrecy and friendship. Those terms were the reservation of every letter connected with the families of Ethelstone, Glenmore, and Raycliffe, besides an embargo upon those of some of the minor lights of Abbots Thorpe, particularly Thomas Rymer, in order that he might peruse them, and afterwards destroy them, if he thought proper. The art of opening and reclosing letters had long been acquired by the Bankses.

"So," said Mr. Trapps, re-entering the post-office by the back door—"so you have had Miss Raycliffe here. What might *she* say for herself?"

"Say! you seem to take matters mighty cool," answered Mrs. Banks, flushing angrily. "I can tell you what, we shall all be in a hot box before long—you, and all of us, Mr. Trapps."

"I, Mrs. Banks? I have no cause to fear; John Trapps can always clear himself and prove *his* honesty; it is you and poor Martha I am anxious

about. But Miss Raycliffe, what of her? she is a young lady of large mind, has a pretty strong will, generally called determination of character."

"Say? do you ask what Miss Raycliffe said?" replied the religious Martha; "why she raved and stormed like a fury, threatened us, and left the house with her hand clenched, declaring that we and you had cheated her out of her letters, and that those she does receive have every one of them been opened—and there's for you."

"She said, too, we should be reported to the proper authorities. And this is all your doing, Mr. Trapps; things have gone on too far; we shall be ruined and sent over the sea!" said Mrs. Banks, "and as sure as there is," &c. (I will not sully my page by writing the fearful oath the woman uttered), "I will expose you, and tell all, if you don't marry my daughter, and cease this dishonesty in our office. I am tired of it; the constant dread of discovery, and the odium we live in among these people, is killing me by inches."

"Humph! this is good," said Mr. Trapps, after a pause of pretended surprise. "You were always amusing, Mrs. Banks, but if you were as uncivil to Miss Raycliffe as you are to your obedient, don't wonder if she makes you bite the dust before long, now she smells a rat. But quietly, old lady, and don't bluster whilst you inform me what you and your fair daughter have done with all the money you abstracted from letters before I had the satisfaction of so convincingly proving to you that I knew of your dishonest proceedings. I have never

countenanced *that*, nor have I ever opened a single letter in this office—you and Martha have alone been guilty. I am here now, however, to inform you that during my absence in London your duties will be very light. All letters addressed to Miss Raycliffe must be carefully examined, and if there should be one from Hugh Atheling Ethelstone to her, it must be burnt instantly. Mind you make no mistake, and carry out my commands. And now, my friends, adieu! to-morrow I leave for London. During my absence retrieve your characters, be honest, and open no letters, except those I have named; keep your own counsel and defy the world to say a word against you. In a few months the Glenmores will be back again at the hall, and then Martha and I will talk about the wedding-day."

"It is all very fine to make light of affairs in this way, but it won't, it shall not do," replied Mrs. Banks; "if evil comes I will tell all—all; remember *that*, Mr. Trapps, and tremble in your shoes. Indeed, I think it would do me good to make a clean breast of the whole thing, and be sent over the sea; I'm fairly tired out of my life, and care not for this cursed money."

"Don't talk like a fool, mother! Never mind her, John, she is frightened by that minx, but I'll soon bring her round again."

"As you value your own safety, Martha, don't let the old woman take to piety and confession," said Mr. Trapps, as he bade adieu to his fair *inamorata* at the door. "I shall be back again in a few months: write to me frequently, keep up appearances, keep

your own counsel, and don't, by word or deed, compromise yourselves."

"Or you, John," put in Martha; "never, never! I will obey all you say to the letter."

"Affairs will soon be ripe now, and then, ah! for a breath of the free air of fair Columbia—new scenes, new plans, a new world, and plenty of money to spend. Keep up, old girl, we'll enjoy life yet."

Tears actually started into Martha's eyes—she loved that bad, mis-shapen man. They kissed, and then parted. Do snakes kiss and love? The answer is at once given—here were two who did.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was "the season" in London. Conspicuous among the pompous list of fashionable arrivals were the names of Lord Lilsdale and the Glenmores.

Lord Lilsdale's house in Gloucester Place was soon besieged with callers and notes. Thither flocked fashionables, the leaders of parties, and the notabilities of our grand metropolis. "Lord Lilsdale has returned," was the general remark; "have you seen him? Lord Lilsdale! don't you remember he carried all before him about twelve months since, just at the last crisis when the cabinet became shaky? He is very rich, a *parvenu*, and awfully ugly, but he kept the cabinet together, and even influenced its counsels, whilst he delighted the world with his pithy sentences, his vivid images, and his strong practical sense." Outside the "great world" the public hailed his return with delight. He was the very man the people wanted to reconcile jarring elements, and help to form a cabinet.

His lordship, however, understood public life well, and knew how far to value popularity. He received homage graciously, spoke little, but listened marvellously well to the opinions of friends, enemies, and

partisans, whilst he seized upon strong points with his rapid comprehension, and, in the freshness and vigour of his perspicacity, seemed an intellectual giant just awake from refreshing sleep.

He was prepared to re-enter public life, because he knew that his country required his services. He had watched the development of every question in his retirement, and whilst others wrangled, he was ready to take a dispassionate view, with expectation and trust grouping anxiously around him. His advice was sought, his suggestions acted upon, and he was soon to become a leader in the great arena of politics.

At home, in his stately but desolate house, he was a quiet saddened man, caring little for the dinners, concerts, balls, to which his many friends so assiduously invited him notwithstanding his ugliness.

A sad and forlorn man, was James Lord Lilsdale under his own roof! What cared he for his splendid home, where there was no work-table to remind him of hands and smiles he loved, or of those little feet which he once so fondly hoped might wear away the gloss of newness from his costly carpets? What, that he had high office, patronage, power? They did not fill the void—he was not satisfied! Smiles from lovely lips were gracious, hands were extended flatteringly, he was quoted, petted, and imitated, yet Lord Lilsdale was unhappy.

Meta was pleased to hear of his return from the Continent, and read his speeches in the paper with

avidity. In a short time he wrote to her to inform her of his return to England, his visit to his constituents, and his busy life in the world of fashion and politics.

"Labour is my vocation, dear Miss Raycliffe," he wrote; "I have discovered that in the solitude of my travels; therefore here I am ready to snatch back the idle days I have passed during the last twelve months, and devote them to my country's good. I have no time to lose, for in strict confidence I may tell you I am no longer twenty-five, and already begin to feel an interest in the medical science which can ward off rheumatism, bronchitis, and the horrors of red flannel."

There was not a word in allusion to what had passed between them, but an evident desire to renew their acquaintance upon the old terms of friendship and kindly regard. This was a great relief to Meta. She respected and revered Lord Lilsdale, and the withdrawal of his friendship and generous sympathy had been a sore trial during the past twelve months.

"I shall still retain his friendship," she thought; "he has evidently forgiven, and perhaps forgotten, the annoyance, the pain I caused him, and can like me as a friend again. Oh, I am thankful it is so!"

Meta answered Lord Lilsdale's letter immediately. Could she have followed her reply to its destination, and seen the lines, in which her own full heart had poured out its richness of thought, conned again and again as a mine of treasure to that astute but lonely

great man, she might have suspected the mere friendliness of his regard, and suspected a continuance of his love.

Some men require a home and a happy domestic life to fill up the gap between the great world and solitude. Lord Lilsdale was one. He longed for a wife in whose sympathy and love he could confide; and he longed for children in whose affection and prattle he could ever find his truest enjoyment.

The Glenmores, too, were in London. Abbots Thorpe was shut up, left to the care and enjoyment of a few domestics and the twenty-four gardeners who smoothed its noble walks, nurtured its prize roses and its exotics. Furniture and chandeliers were encased in brown holland—put to bed during the summer, on the same principle that fashionable people sleep during the day and are wide-awake at midnight. They must remain tucked up until the glory of London pales, and languid fashion turns again for rest, peace, and refreshment to the cool calm shades of nature. All men and women are more or less nomadic, and Nature suits herself to every mood of the human mind, because she was made for God's creatures; we may forsake her for a time, but only to seek her again with renewed zest.

It is the month of June, and London is in her glory. Hyde Park is crowded with human butterflies, whilst balls, concerts, and opera whirl their votaries in a giddy round of pleasure. If a man were dropped from the clouds and set upon his feet suddenly upon the borders of the Serpentine in the "London season," he might certainly be for-

given if he imagined her Majesty's liege subjects had for the nonce taken leave of their senses, and were exercising themselves in the rites of madness. The crawling carriages, one after another, with pug dogs at their windows; the idle, lolling bodies in every diversity of attitude, with their sharp eyes piercing right and left; the *beaux* and *belles* of established fame yonder in Rotten Row cantering or trotting for very life; the knots of old and young men and women, dressed to perfection in the accumulated civilisation of centuries. Surely hoops, hats, and bonnets, and long-tailed coats, can scarcely be less grotesque than the beads, feathers, and finery of an Indian chief! Habit, and being to the manner born, alone covers the absurdity of our overdone refinement. There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Some such thoughts as these were floating through Hugh Ethelstone's brain whilst lounging away his time, waiting for the appearance of his youthful bride Marian, whom he had promised to meet in the drive.

"So at last we meet," said Theodore Ellerton, accosting Hugh with his own bright smile. "I was soliloquising over these rails, preaching myself a sermon from the text, 'Fashion, famine, and folly,' when I observed you threading your way through the crowd. I perceive, my dear fellow, you are no longer a stranger in London society, but on good terms with yourself and the world. I saw you running the gauntlet of all those bright eyes, and thought no end of complimentary things about

you, when, lo! it turns out to be my good friend, Ethelstone. For a tyro you seem not to lack acquaintance."

"People my family knew in days gone by, who, now that I am rich in this world's goods, thanks to my kind uncle, are ready to spring upon me from every corner and greet me with smiles. I know, however, *how* to value such friendships."

"Tell me," said Hugh, shortly afterwards, "who is that plain but distinguished-looking man talking to Lady Adela Stainford?"

"That? Oh! don't you know him? he is the great Lord Lilsdale, orator, poet, and one of the leading spirits of the day."

Hugh blanched, cheeks and lips, but only for a moment. With what interest did he follow that man's every look and every gesture—not because he was the great Lilsdale, who could make and unmake Cabinets, but that he was Meta's choice, and was to be Meta's husband! Well, what of that, Hugh? You are married; Meta Raycliffe is nothing now to you; turn your thoughts from her and greet your lovely bride with a smile as she drives up to you. The friends turned to meet the carriage, and as they did so Ellerton bowed low to a young lady who, with two others, passed slowly by in a barouche. Hugh was struck with the beauty of the younger lady, as she raised her veil and revealed a face of surpassing loveliness, variable in its expression, one moment prettily arch, perversely gay, and the next so deeply pensive, you felt sure some great grief lay at her heart.

"And who are your friends—that fair Juliet who has just passed?" asked Hugh.

"That? Oh! again, don't you know her?" replied Mr. Ellerton, in some confusion; "she is the reigning beauty of London, the fair Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore; and as unhappy as she is good and lovely," he added with a sigh.

"I did not recognise her. What a lot in life! Can anything be more pitiable than a neglected beautiful wife?"

"The man who can leave such a being as Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore unprotected to the tender mercies of the world, the attentions of unprincipled *roués*, men of high *ton*, but small sense and few ideas, deserves whatever he brings upon his own head," said Ellerton, almost fiercely, as he observed Gertrude descend from her carriage and seat herself under some trees, whilst a number of fashionable men lounged around her, doing homage to her youth, her beauty, and her witty conversation.

"Does she flirt, then?" asked Hugh. "I have a thorough contempt for a married woman who is a coquette."

"Never flirts, but only does what fashion demands—makes herself agreeable, and *voilà* the result! I'd rather marry a witch than be tied to a Venus whom all the world admires!" said Ellerton, with so much asperity Hugh looked into his face to read the leading thought to it. It was black as night, whilst its charm, his smile, had gone.

Marian's carriage drove up. Their greetings over, Mr. Ellerton said, "Will you kindly wait for me—I

must speak to Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore. I shall not be away many moments."

Hugh was surprised at the sudden change in Mr. Ellerton, and watched his receding figure curiously. He made his way to the Glenmore party, and in a few moments Mrs. Harcourt rose from her seat, and walked to a side pathway in earnest conversation with him.

"It is odd," thought Hugh, "but no business of mine."

In a very short time they were rejoined by Mr. Ellerton.

Marian felt sorry to see him return; all day long she had anticipated this walk with Hugh alone, and now to be disappointed!

"You are not glad to see me, love," said Hugh, surprised at the shade which crossed her face; "do not turn your eyes away, or I shall think you are not pleased."

"Not pleased! Oh, do not think that! I am always pleased when you are near me; but I didn't want Mr. Ellerton's company, that was all," said Marian, looking into Hugh's face with guileless affection.

Then they were silent—the young husband felt at the moment too happy to speak. And Marian, how unchanged is she! Still the same child-like, dreamy look; the same soft blue eyes looking love and trust into yours, though they perhaps are a shade more pensive than before, and the ring of her laugh is perhaps a thought less merry than of old. Marian is a matron now, and will soon be a mother, therefore it is that she is more staid, but not less happy.

A few turns under the shady trees, the greetings of many friends, and the fashionable gossip of others, at length tired them out, and they were glad to enter their carriage and return home. They were obliged, however, to keep the line, and this compelled them to take another turn around the drive.

"Do look, Hugh! how can that girl ride so fast?" remarked Marian, as a young lady with very black eyes, and long glossy ringlets, passed along Rotten Row, attended by a gentleman, at a gallop which in these days might have reminded one of the Balaclava charge.

Hugh turned his head in the direction of Marian's eyes, and exclaimed, "Harcourt Glenmore, I declare!"

"Oh! I had no idea; I am so sorry, Hugh!" commenced Marian, tearfully.

"Sorry, dearest, why should you be sorry? What care I for meeting him? It is he, I think, who could scarcely look me in the face. But how bad and bloated he looks, Ellerton. I should say he is fast going to the dogs."

"And that bold-looking creature with him," remarked Marian; "and I believe he has such a lovely wife; Ellinor told me all about her."

"All London rings with scandal about the Glenmores," replied Ellerton. "Harcourt Glenmore and that bold girl are common food for gossip. Her name is Cecilia Rookes, the daughter of a purse-proud, vulgar lawyer, who has purchased Holmlee, the ancient home of the Raycliffe family. Harcourt is infatuated with that artful creature, and her family are blind to the scandal, because they imagine an

CHAPTER XXII.

"You look tired, dearest," said Hugh, as he led his wife up the stairs to her own quiet room, where they spent some of their happiest hours.

"I am a little tired; but oh, the happiness of home!" said she, throwing herself upon the nearest couch. "How I wish you, and I, and papa, lived in a cottage covered with honeysuckles and roses, far away from London, from that dreadful Hyde Park, for instance, and far away from the gay world. If I could only stay at home this evening! but there is Lady Adela Stainford's dinner. Do go without me, Hugh."

"No, not without you; but we will send a note, and decline, if you feel too unwell to venture."

"Ah, that would never do—Mr. Stainford is one of papa's strongest supporters! Dear papa! I never see him now," she added with a sigh. "Oh, Hugh! I do hope you will never be a public man like he is; yet to see you great, honoured, and applauded by the world would be delightful. And you will some day, Hugh; already fame has touched you with her magic breath, and ten years hence——"

"What?" he asked with a laugh; "shall I be a

Burke, a Fox, a Canning? It must be in the political line I'm to grow great, Marian. I wonder if oratory would be my *forte!* You shall be Mr. Speaker, I the orator, chairs and tables learned members—those are the opposition benches."

He jumped upon an ottoman and harangued. Marian laughed at first, but cared not to listen; gradually, however, she attended, and at length sat spell-bound, listening to a flow of eloquence whose musical cadence charmed her ears and enthralled her senses.

"Hugh, Hugh, I had no idea you could speak like that; you must eventually, with such a gift, become great, and then be courted, adulated, admired."

"Ah yes! I'll enter parliament, Marian, now, at once, and strike terror into Lord Lilsdale's cabinet, set all the world talking, newspapers writing, and then consent to assist the ministers; and—and thus save my country. There's a dream of greatness for you!"

"Not so very much overdrawn," she replied, with simple wifely pride. "I may not perhaps live long; but you have a great career before you. I know it; you have all the elements of success, and papa says so. You will live to restore your name and lineage to a high position; fame, fortune, health will be yours; and you have a name and presence which can place you among the very highest in the land. Oh, Hugh! you are lost with me! I am not the wife for you; I am too—too——"

"Too good, too beautiful for me," he replied, drawing her to his side, and pressing her to him with fond affection. "But why this shade of melancholy? What have I said to produce it, dearest?"

"Said—said? Nothing, Hugh; but only been too kind and considerate."

"There is something—you have not told me the reason, and a wife should have no secrets from her husband; every feeling and thought should be as open as the day."

"Should it? Well then, last night, at the St. Clairs', I did not feel well, so sauntered alone into a conservatory; there was a seat behind the door, where, unobserved, I remained for some time. At length three or four persons entered the adjoining room; and oh, Hugh! I heard them say such unkind things about papa and me! We were *parvenus;* and papa was a mere purse-proud, vulgar man, I a nonentity, and you a man of noble family, very much to be pitied because you are married to a silly, weak creature like myself!"

"And why should you care, dearest, what such people say? They speak their own shallow thoughts, and not sensible facts; for instance, they cannot know that you and I were cousins, and that I should have been a beggar but for your father. And as to your being a nonentity," exclaimed Hugh, warmly, "surely it was said by some one who did not know you; although, darling, I must confess that I hope you will ever continue a nonentity among the leaders of Fashion."

Hugh kissed away his wife's tears, and then poured forth his words of loving comfort—now a burst of tenderness, now a supplicating pardon for some imagined neglect of his own—rapid transitions of feeling arising from the young, fresh June of his warm and hearty nature.

Hugh was scarcely conscious of the fact, but Marian was not fitted to shine in fashionable society; it was at home, in domestic life, her lovely disposition developed most conspicuously all its exquisite forces. Her true vocation was the gentle, loving, admirable "wife," to soothe, to admire, and encourage her husband, and wind around him the poetic fancies of her child-like imagination, whilst she leaned upon him for protection and support. Then her smile could break forth like a sunbeam from out of Paradise, and chase away every gloomy cloud.

Hugh at length left his wife's room, to prepare for the Stainford's dinner; on the stairs he met Miles Gorton, who had just returned home, worn out with fatigue.

"You look tired, sir. This public business is killing you by inches. You do too much."

"Not too much generally, but I am over-worked just now. How is Marian, and city news, too? You must talk to me, Hugh; Cæsar himself could not be more laconic than I feel to-night. That foundation stone affair, and the infliction last night of a public dinner and a long speech, have fairly worn me out."

Hugh carried out his father-in-law's wishes, and

talked to him whilst he dressed, in all the confidence of sonship, upon politics, business, and Marian's health, which had again become a subject of intense anxiety to them both.

Whilst this was passing, Marian reposed upon the couch in her own dressing-room. She had dismissed her maid for half an hour, in order to enjoy a new book which Hugh had given her that morning—Longfellow's "Evangeline," illustrated.

The lovely poem seemed to raise her spirit to the land of poesy, and link her own young heart nearer, closer to her beloved Hugh's, for Marian bathed all her best and holiest feelings in the rosy sunlight of poetic sentiment. How lovely she looked, lying there in her simple white and pink dressing-gown! all her golden hair loose from its bands, and covering her like a veil! She was fair, fair to behold, a sort of celestial brightness, an ethereal beauty, shining in her face and encircling her form.

As she lay there a strange depression seemed to steal over her spirit. The book dropped from her hand, tears started to her eyes, and she rose from her couch to shake off the unpleasant feeling. For a few moments she stood musing by the open window, with the sorrowful shade gradually deepening upon her face. What if Hugh did not love her? That strange, strange letter told her to watch him, and not to believe in his deceitful expressions of affection, because he loved, and had always loved, another. Then, too, that letter was anonymous, and she had been taught to treat every such communication with the contempt it deserved. Still her heart misgave

her, and she was unhappy. Hugh had spoken once of Meta Raycliffe, Reginald's sister, and she observed that when her name was mentioned he always turned pale, whilst his lip quivered with agitation. It must be Meta Raycliffe! The truth flashed upon her with that intuition which belongs to the union of sensitive feeling and active thought.

But no, she would not think it. Hugh to her was truth itself, and would not have vowed eternal love to her had his heart been another's. No, no; she would never doubt him again; he was hers—hers alone!

Hope soon returns to a nature such as Marian's. She quickly brightened, like a beautiful landscape which has lain beneath a summer cloud of rain, and now again is joyous in the returning sunlight.

Marian gave one parting look at the gorgeous summer sky, and then turned to ring the bell for Jessie, her maid. As she stood at the window she was observed by a small, mean-looking, but very neat man, who clenched his teeth, chuckled a hideous laugh to himself, and gave a note to a boy who happened to be passing.

"Will you take this to No. 20 in the Square, ask for Miss Jessie Smith, and give the note to her? When you return you shall have this," holding up sixpence.

That man was Mr. Trapps.

Jessie entered her young mistress's room, smart and smiling as usual. She carried a small silver salver, and upon it an elegant-looking note directed to "Mrs. Ethelstone."

Marian drew a long breath, and turned deadly pale.

"Who brought this?" she tremulously inquired.

"A boy, ma'am; he did not wait for a reply."

"Leave me for a short time; I will ring when I require your services."

Once alone, it was some moments before she could venture to break the seal. When she did, she read on silently, her tears dropping fast, without effort or sob. Gradually the pallor of death overspread her face, and she had to toss back her long hair, and bathe her brow with *eau de cologne* in order to ward off the dreadful faintness which had seized her. Powerlessly she sank upon the couch, holding the horrid letter before her, but not reading it.

"He, Hugh, my husband will be here, and oh! I could not bear to see him now."

With an effort, she rose to lock her door, and whilst doing so, burst into a passion of tears. It was the first time she had shut out her husband, the first time she had had a secret.

The letter ran thus—

"Gentle Lady,—You are deceived, and that excellent man your father is deceived. You have taken an unprincipled, a perjured man to your bosom, your hearth, your home. Hugh Atheling Ethelstone never loved you—he loved Meta Raycliffe, and before he left Abbots Thorpe plighted his troth to her. Until your marriage she believed him true, and now his perfidy is killing her; she lies dangerously ill, nay, is said to be dying. You may ask, 'Why then did he marry me?' The reply is simple—not for love, but

for money, as even now he adores Meta Raycliffe. Say nothing, watch well, and then you will discover all, and in the meantime, believe me, a sincere and ever-faithful friend to yourself and father."

A tap came to the door.

"May I come in, love?" asked Miles Gorton's manly voice.

"In an instant, papa. I am dressing," said Marian, with an effort at immediate composure which only women can achieve.

"Oh, then I will come again when your toilet is complete, only I think you might let me in considering I have not seen you for three whole days."

That was sufficient, the note was secreted in a private drawer, and Marian the next moment pressed to her father's heart in a fond embrace.

"Ah, pet! but here have been tears! Fie! only married a few months and crying—what can they mean?" asked Mr. Gorton with a look of great concern, as Hugh entered his wife's room.

Marian's breast heaved painfully as she tried to avoid her husband's eye. He gently took her hand and drew her fondly to him, but still she would not look at him; it was as if guilt had suddenly risen up between them and separated their hearts with its grim presence.

Marian was not an adept at subterfuge, so sought refuge in tears.

"My child, my own Marian, confide in me what is wrong, tell me all!" said Mr. Gorton with tears in his eyes.

Confide—tell her father of Hugh's perfidy—

impossible! no, she would die first! But should she name the letter to Hugh? that was the question, to be answered by a determined "No, never!" Human being should never see that letter or know its contents while she lived.

"Dear papa," she said, trying to be calm, "forgive me this ebullition. I am not well, and I tried my feelings too much with that lovely poem Hugh gave me to read, and—and I don't want to meet that dreadful Lady Estcourt with her shaking teeth, and half-a-dozen other people who look down upon you and myself. I hate visiting," she added pettishly.

"You were left too long alone, dearest," said Hugh, pained to observe his wife's eye still averted from his.

What could it mean? Hugh was perplexed and unhappy. His darling Marian (for Hugh had learnt to wind his tenderest holiest feelings around his gentle wife) was sad and disquieted, nay, had even shuddered when he grasped her hand in his.

This was not the first time he had observed a change in her. She had grown uncertain—at one time all joy and love, meeting him upon his return from business with playful reproach because he was late, and at another distant, shy, and reserved. What could it mean? Hugh could not solve the question. How different to those happy hours when she sported around him like a fawn, her silvery laugh responding in joyous peals to his own light-hearted gaiety. But now for hours Marian would not be herself; no longer playful and arch, but slow, spiritless, and sad.

Often as Hugh sat near her, reading, she would fix her eyes upon his face with a wistful gaze of inquiry, drop her work from her listless hands, and sigh heavily. Hugh could not deceive himself, or mistake that sigh—it was grief. "What could be fretting her?" he asked himself twenty times a day, whilst he redoubled his fond attentions, and catechised himself severely. He was tormented, and began to doubt Marian's sincere affection for himself. He questioned her, and implored her to tell him all. Then, falteringly, she would answer, smile away his suspicions, and again brighten for a time.

Those were trying days for Hugh; but he bore them patiently, in hopeful trust of the future.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Meta Raycliffe, after her interview with Mrs. Banks and her daughter, returned home with a lightened heart; she even passed Holmlee without a sigh. Hugh loved her, was true, and would yet prove himself everything she could desire. There had been treachery, and Mr. Trapps was the traitor. Meta felt certain of this fact the more she considered it. Her letters had been tampered with — most probably never sent—and those written by Hugh to herself abstracted by the Bankses at the instigation of Mr. Trapps.

"What course, then, should she pursue?" Meta Raycliffe was not one likely to submit quietly to fraud and injustice—the perpetrators must be punished and right vindicated. To-morrow she would see Mr. Leslie, take his advice upon the matter, and immediately act upon it, there was no time to be lost, and Meta's great natural force of character lay in her resolution. Calmly and quietly she considered a subject until her mind was made up to a particular line of conduct, and once convinced of a duty, she never dreamed of going contrary to it. There was no talk about "duty," or "decision of

character," for it was Meta's nature to act principles and not to talk them, and this it was which gave her the power and influence over the minds of others which she certainly possessed to a remarkable degree. Surely, "an arguing woman" is the equivalent to Solomon's contentious one, and "is rottenness in a man's bones?" My sisters, let us sign a compact "not to argue," but to leave the masculine enjoyment entirely to our husbands and brothers; depend upon it, if we do so, we shall gain considerably in their good graces.

Meta returned to her own home in higher spirits than she had been for months. Mrs. Mortimer marvelled at it, but was delighted to find her transformed into the happy light-hearted Meta Raycliffe of bygone days.

Surely, thought Mrs. Mortimer, it is Lord Lilsdale who has worked this change! Then, with a gush of pleasure she looked at Meta and pictured her the idolised wife and mistress of Ashlee Court.

"Dear grandmamma, you have not had a walk over the heath for a fortnight," said Meta; "I am going to see some of my friends, and I want you to go with me. Nay, no refusal, it will do you good."

Mrs. Mortimer still shook her head negatively.

Meta continued: "I have three fat babies I must show you (by-the-bye, I hope you have knitted those socks for them). I have some red flannel I *must* take to poor John Evans for his rheumatic shoulder, and—oh! there are twenty things we must do, besides looking at the cricketers and talking to the cottagers."

"Impossible, my dear Meta, you are too impulsive; besides, I don't approve of a familiar style with people who are—are—are, in fact, low."

"Low people! granny dear. Oh! don't say that; why we have not a single *low* individual upon the 'common!' We are in a miniature Eutopia of our own! There's Nancy Fleming, bed-ridden ten years, and never heard to even whisper a word of complaint; there's Lucy Fairclough, a model housewife; and there's Betty and Luke Sykes, left with nine little orphan grandchildren to feed, clothe, and bring up upon their own hard earnings, which they do most cheerfully. Oh, no! I cannot excuse you; you *must* come, it will do you good, and make you so happy, so thankful, and so contented."

"Boots, bonnet, and shawl, all here," said Meta, suiting the action to the word, by equipping Mrs. Mortimer for the walk.

Mrs. Mortimer argued and rebelled, but nevertheless yielded to Meta's persuasion at last.

The whole of that evening Meta felt the same thrill of happiness. The world, and all it contained, seemed to be made for her, and this because Hugh's painful silence had, to her mind, been explained.

The following morning she rose at an earlier hour than usual, determined to take immediate and vigorous steps against Mrs. Banks and her daughter. Whilst at breakfast the postman arrived, with an unusually large number of letters and newspapers. "Not one from Hugh! No, and never will be, until Mrs. Banks and her wicked accomplice, Mr. Trapps, are brought to justice. But here is one

from Reginald, another from Lord Lilsdale, and two from old school companions. I am rich in news to-day," thought Meta, as she opened her brother's letter. As she read a cloud gradually gathered upon her brow; she did not like the spirit in which it was written, and it gave her food for anxious thought.

Reginald's means were painfully small; he was harassed to death with constant demands upon his purse, the poor in his wretched district regarding him as a Crœsus whom it was their especial duty to fleece. "Of all positions in the world," wrote Reginald, "the most miserable is that of a poor clergyman in a poverty-stricken parish. Harassed by daily demands upon his purse, overwhelmed with church incidental expenses, school-debts to defray, and a thousand other matters pressing upon him, missionary-work in the South Pacific would be happiness and ease compared to it. I am determined (he wrote) to give up my district and church, leave England, and join one or other of our colonial bishops abroad, and as a preliminary step in this direction, I have this morning sent in my resignation."

Meta was pained, almost stunned by this letter. She could not endure the thought of his leaving England. "No, no," she said, "I will go to London and dissuade him from such a mad scheme before it is too late." Ellinor had often pressed her to visit them and she would no longer be obstinate, but at once write and accept her invitation.

Whilst thus forming her plans she mechanically opened one of the newspapers, and spread it out upon

the table. Her thoughts were far away in London, although her eye rested upon the paper. Suddenly the mist cleared, and she perceived the name of "Hugh Atheling Ethelstone." In an instant her brain was clear, and every thought, except of Hugh, vanished from her mind. Surely there must be some mistake! No, there it was, and there could not be two of that name. Meta read, "On the 10th inst., at St.—— Church, by the Rev. Theodore Ellerton, M.A., Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, to Marian, only child of Miles Gorton, Esquire, of Eaton Square, and of Lofthouse, in the county of Gloucester."

No word, no sound, issued from Meta's white lips; she sat spell-bound. Mrs. Mortimer fortunately entered the room, and was just in time to prevent her unconscious form falling to the floor. They carried her to bed insensible. Brain fever ensued, and Mrs. Mortimer became so much alarmed, she summoned Reginald and Ellinor as quickly as possible. Meta was fearfully ill.

Troubles never come singly; immediately after Reginald's arrival at the farm poor Mrs. Mortimer succumbed to overwrought feeling, fatigue, and an exhausted frame. The physician said the shock of Meta's sudden illness had been too much for her, and that he had very faint hope of her recovery. And he was right, for whilst poor Meta still lay upon her bed unconscious of all around, the old lady quietly and very thankfully passed away without a sigh, because she believed her beloved Meta would soon join her in the realms above.

Not so, however, to the surprise of all. Meta recovered.

During her delirium and illness many painful and remorseful feelings had whelmed into Reginald's heart. If his sister should die, could he hold himself blameless? Had he not in some measure been the cause of this misery? A blush mantled upon his cheek when he remembered that even after Meta's indignant denial of any engagement with Lord Lilsdale, he had not informed Hugh of the fact, but had allowed the conviction of her faithlessness to remain upon his mind.

Ellinor knew nothing of all this, and Reginald shrank from imparting to her any such information; her truthful, honest nature would not approve of the deception; so he maintained silence, although Ellinor questioned him very closely after listening to his sister's painful ravings.

After many weeks of prolonged suffering, Meta was at length sufficiently well to recline upon a couch supported by pillows.

As she regained strength to think, she lay contemplating Ellinor's quiet figure, and the peaceful expression of her beautiful face, as she sat at her side sewing.

"She has an angel's face! I love her! She is good!" mused Meta. "But she is a Glenmore;" with that thought came a slight shudder; "but what of that? Hugh was untrue—I mistook his character, and I may possibly have been unjust to the Glenmores."

One day Meta was lying upon her couch with her

hand clasped within her brother's. Every now and then she turned her large eyes upon his face with a wistful expression of grief inexpressibly painful to him.

"Can you forgive me, dear Meta? After the first disappointment has worn away you will know all has been done for the best. I have been too unsympathising to win your entire confidence, or this would not have occurred."

"Hugh's marriage—do you mean that?" she asked, with a tear.

"Yes, that was the cause of your illness. I had no idea you loved him so dearly, or would feel his loss so deeply."

"The fact of his marriage to another I could easily get over and forgive; nay, I could even rejoice in his happiness, had I not lost faith in his honesty and sincerity of heart. But the dismal personal experience of evil comes to us all, sooner or later, I have heard it said. In my case it is an agony brought upon me by the one nearest and dearest to me on earth—one whom I have trusted most, and who has been to me the polished column which has upheld my love, my trust, my faith in all that is true and good. That crumbles to the dust, and I find my structure of faith has been reared upon sand and rubbish, and must fall, lying for ever after in the mire of doubt, suspicion, and distrust. Oh! it is a mystery, but a painfully practical one," she added, with the tears streaming down her face.

"When your mind has recovered its usual healthy energy, Meta, you will think differently. Besides,"

said he, with a slight touch of his religious austerity, "you seem to me completely to ignore the dealings of an all-ruling Power. Afflictions are always sent to draw us nearer to God; if we lose faith and trust in man, it is that we may have more in our Maker. You made an idol of Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, he stood between you and your God, and it will be well for your soul if you pluck the image away from your heart as the unholy thing which hitherto has hindered your advancement in godliness."

"The principles you lay down, Reginald, I know to be always correct; but your mode of enforcing them appears to me to fall far short of that pity for poor human nature and that loving-kindness manifested by the great Exemplar."

"Dear Meta, I did not intend to pain you, but to remind you of duty. It certainly is not right that, at your age, and with so many blessings, you should allow your mind to be embittered for ever by this one disappointment in life."

"Nor shall I, Reginald," she replied, firmly; "only give me time—a month—and you will then find that, outwardly, I shall be the same 'Meta' as of old. Oh, if Hugh had only written to me—been candid, and told me he no longer loved me—I could have endured the pang of desertion with fortitude, and might even have believed it to be, as you say, 'all for the best!' It is the utter heartlessness of his conduct which distresses me most."

"If," asked Reginald, almost tremulously, "if you were told that Hugh's conduct towards yourself is blameless, and that it has been brought about by

the fortuitous pressure of circumstances, could you derive comfort from the fact?"

"Oh, Reginald, indeed I could! Only let me be assured of his continual singleness of heart, and I think I could either live or die happily."

"Then, Meta, forgive him, and renew your faith in his truth and sincerity. During the past two years he has believed you engaged to Lord Lilsdale."

"And who could—who dared to poison his ear with such a falsehood?" she asked passionately.

Reginald winced; but truth and honour demanded this extenuation of Hugh's conduct, and he determined to explain all, even at the risk of compromising himself.

"I did," he replied, with what appeared to his sister unfeeling composure.

"You did!—you, Reginald Raycliffe, tell a lie?—you, a clergyman, a priest, a Raycliffe? Oh, Reginald! how could you be guilty of such wickedness?"

"I did not believe it to be a lie," he calmly replied. "You and I had words—you remember the day—it was about this farm of yours. I objected to it, and said the occupation was unfeminine, and would subject you to much criticism. Well, you refused to give up your scheme and live with me, so we parted; and when I married, you neither would come to the wedding nor be introduced to Ellinor. Do you remember?"

"I do; a Glenmore was hateful to me, and I could not understand how your principles or feelings would permit you to marry into their family. Not

only do they hold the very lands which, for generations, our forefathers cursed the Ethelstones for retaining, but they hold them at the expense of truth, justice, and honour; for by every law of right they belong to Hugh—and they know it."

"Ellinor is no longer a Glenmore, but a Raycliffe. With her family I am not even acquainted; therefore, am not amenable at the bar of conscience for any of their misdeeds. I think, however, that the Glenmores have perhaps as much moral right to the heritage of Abbots Thorpe as Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, and that the detention of those lands from the Church is sin."

"The right of the Ethelstones to the lands of Abbots Thorpe I will not discuss," replied Meta, gravely; "but will you tell me how many families there are in England who, in days gone by, gained possession of their lands in a similar way, and yet are not cursed generation after generation by 'the Raycliffes' of their neighbourhood? Oh, depend upon it, Reginald, if the Ethelstones have been guilty of wrong, we, the Raycliffes, have committed frightful wickedness in the sight of God by the perpetuation of a curse upon our neighbour which disgraces the name of our ancestor, Richard Raycliffe. Surely, Reginald, you have read mediæval literature until you have walked back into the dark ages, and are bitten with its withering superstition. I believe it not. Judge not—curse not. These are Divine commands, and whatever wrong the Ethelstones may have committed, it is not for us to outrage religion by perpetuating a curse

which had its origin in the malice of a sinfully angry man."

"Meta, you ought not to discuss such matters; they are evidently quite beyond your comprehension. Let me, however, disabuse your mind of one error. Pray do not run away with the idea that I would, if I could, perpetuate a curse upon any man. I merely believe, that those families who retain possession of lands wrested from the Church, against conscience and the law of right, are placed in a position of antagonism to religion, and, consequently, of antagonism to God. But enough of this, Meta; already you are fearfully flushed and excited with this conversation. It has been too much for you; let me call Ellinor," said Reginald, kindly.

"No, not at present; I have more to say, and this explanation will do me good, especially if you can clear Hugh Ethelstone from the charge of heartless insincerity. And if, by word or deed, you have practised a deception upon him, God forgive you as I hope to be forgiven. Oh, Reginald, surely you have never, never loved truly, or you could not have been guilty of this cruelty!"

"Do you cast a doubt upon my affection for my beloved wife?" he asked, almost fiercely.

"Yes, I do," Meta replied, calmly. "You are too selfish, too inconsiderate, too exacting, too irritable, in short, too thoroughly 'a Raycliffe,' to be excellent as a husband. Ellinor adores you, she is your slave, and you condescend to love her and be her task-master. That is it. I am your sister, and may therefore speak the truth plainly to you."

Reginald's fine face flushed to the very roots of his hair, and the veins swelled upon his brow like blue cords, whilst he bit his lips to prevent an angry rejoinder. Perhaps, too, a vivid recollection of his wife's sweet, uncomplaining, self-denying life arose in contrast with his own hasty, overbearing disposition.

The wife often walks through life unable to discern the dark specks upon the sun which lights her path, and who would be so cruel as to supply her with the lens which would reveal them to her sight? It is a blessed mental deficiency, and may it always continue! Not so, however, with sisters, who rarely see the faults of their brothers through any rose-tinted medium.

Meta's eyes were completely open to her brother's many faults of disposition, and at this moment she felt particularly irritated at the part he had taken with regard to herself and Hugh.

Had she only been the victim she could have forgiven it more readily; but Hugh! oh, it was too bad!

"I see, Meta, it is useless to talk longer," said Reginald, rising to leave the room; "you have no sisterly love, no confidence in my integrity. I grieve to think that we two, the last of the Raycliffes, are so completely dissevered in affection."

"Not so, Reginald; I love you dearly, and were it necessary would lay down my very life for you, but ——"

"Don't add a 'but,' because that was said like your own dear old self, Meta. Bless you for those

words, they will comfort me when I am far away; my work lies in foreign missions, I think, but am not certain, for I am born under an unlucky planet, and nothing seems to prosper I take in hand."

Meta thought she knew the reason why, but felt unwilling to enter upon the subject.

"We will talk of future plans another day, dear Reginald; I am tired, and should like to rest alone, after you have told me more about Hugh."

"I have nothing more to say, except that I feel certain he would not have married his cousin unless he had firmly believed you had deserted him and engaged yourself to Lord Lilsdale. I told him you were going to marry, because I heard it from Mrs. Mortimer, who wrote a special letter to me announcing the fact, which I communicated to Hugh the same day when we accidentally met. He seemed greatly surprised, turned fearfully white, and said he should write and ask you the question himself before he believed it. This he did, and wrote letter after letter, but you never deigned a reply. Then he was seized with a fearful illness, and was in a hospital for many weeks. After his recovery he wrote to you repeatedly, but always with the same result—no answer. In London it was currently reported that Lord Lilsdale was engaged to a marvellous young lady who had taken to farming in order to rescue her family from the jaws of poverty, and, strange to say, Lord Lilsdale even permitted the congratulations of his friends."

"I am sure that was *before* he went on the Continent," Meta remarked.

"I cannot speak as to the time, I merely state the fact. From that moment, however, Hugh believed the report, and went about for many months a perfect wreck of his former self."

"Poor Hugh!" said Meta, with the tears quickly chasing each other down her colourless cheeks.

"Afterwards," Reginald continued, "a new light seemed to shine upon him, and he loved his beautiful cousin, Marian Gorton, whom he has since married."

"Oh, Reginald, this is too much for me! leave me for a time. You cannot understand what I feel, and pray heaven you never may!" She sank back upon her pillow, and fell into an agony of weeping, whilst her brother gazed upon her prostrate form, given up to the anguish of this great grief, with mingled feelings of compassion and self-condemnation.

"She will never be the same to me again," he thought bitterly; "and yet I did all for the best."

Reginald knelt by his sister's couch, longing for forgiveness, but without a thought of pleading for it, the hot tears falling fast from his eyes upon Meta's hand.

In a very few moments she had subdued her own passion of tears and was finding words to comfort her brother.

"Forgive me, Reginald; I have been very wayward, and very unkind; do not grieve. I forgive the past, and can, I trust, perceive that every trial is sent to strengthen as well as test our faith. You and I, Reginald, have never understood each other. Let the past be forgotten, and for the future never speak

to me of Hugh—promise me this, Reginald. I shall soon be strong again, now I know all the truth; besides, it is only those who have no vocation who are permanently miserable, and I have many duties to perform."

Meta caressed and soothed her brother so effectually, that when Ellinor entered the room a short time afterwards, she found them calmly discussing Reginald's plans for the future.

After awhile Reginald left them together; he had letters to write, a newspaper to read, for already his feelings had been kept too long at high-pressure mark, and he was glad to seek relief in the every-day routine of affairs outside his sister's sick room.

After he left, a few kind words from Ellinor drew forth the whole piteous history which lay so heavily at Meta's heart. She, however, carefully avoided throwing any blame upon her brother, or exposing the deception he had practised upon Hugh. Not for worlds would she that Ellinor should lose a tittle of respect for her husband. No, that must be kept inviolate. Reserves were now over, and they were sisters, dearer in heart and feeling to each other after every explanation; griefs, errors, and misunderstandings were laid open and cleared up, which otherwise might have produced an inextricable complication of mischief.

Ellinor told all she knew about Hugh since he went to London, and Meta never tired of the theme. Then she gradually unfolded the gentle character of his wife, her girlishness, her beauty, and her tender love for Hugh, from the first hour of their meeting,

dwelling particularly upon Marian's sweet poetic nature, her fragile, childish appearance, her delicate organisation, until Meta was thoroughly interested, and could even think of her as Hugh's wife with pleasure.

"Oh, Ellinor! with such a lovely being as you describe, he must be happy! If he had sold himself to some intolerable scold or shrew because he believed me faithless, how much my present grief would have been increased; but now that I know he is happy, and honest as ever, I can resign myself to—to fate; and that is, I suppose, a life of utter loneliness. Oh! if my dear old friend, Mrs. Mortimer, had even been spared to me, I think I could have met the future with a braver heart; but to be here always—alone—my heart sinks at the very thought of it! I talked nonsense about 'my vocation' to Reginald. I have none, except to be miserable; I have no energy for anything, much less can I endure to toil on, as I have done hitherto, for my daily bread; and yet, work I must, or—starve."

"No, no! never, dear Meta, as long as we have a roof to cover us! Return with us to London. Give up this farming—it vexes Reginald—and live with us. Our means are certainly very small; but we have sufficient, and, doubtless, in a short time they will improve."

"Dear Ellinor," replied Meta, with wonderful energy, "do not ask such a thing. Reginald and I could not live happily together for any length of time. Our tastes, pursuits, and ideas are so different. Besides he——" Meta was going to say,

"deceived Hugh," but she stopped short, unwilling to utter an injurious word of her brother to his wife.

"You do not understand each other, Meta. Do not be offended when I add that you are too proud to suffer explanation. I know Reginald's thoughts, motives, and religious life are so high it is sometimes difficult to reach the stand-point from which he takes his view of persons and things."

"But the angels weep when they view a weak and erring human being, whilst Reginald declares himself a Boanerges, ready on all occasions to call down fire from heaven to execute judgment upon the wicked. He is too severe—he is not pitiful, or kind; this is his fault. Old Sir Richard lives again in Reginald. Have you never, dear Ellinor, observed the resemblance in that picture? I have often, and felt sorry."

"I never did," replied Ellinor, rather coldly.

There was silence; both were full of thought, full of misgiving for the future. Ellinor ceased to urge Meta to live with them; nay, she even thought they were better apart, as she well knew her husband's inflexible nature could not tolerate the calm, onward determination of his sister's character. "A woman must be yielding to man, and have no fixed, unalterable determinations." Such was Reginald's manly theory, and Ellinor believed in the implicit obedience of "the wife." Meta's theory was the same; but Reginald was her brother, and she scarcely acknowledged his right over herself. Besides, she lacked faith in his judgment, and even thought he had

mistaken his path in life, and erred in his vocation. Reginald, Meta reasoned, had studied his own inclination more than the duty which lay at his door; he had entered the "ministry" because he wished it, without making one effort to retain the time-honoured inheritance of his forefathers. For this she could not quite respect him, or consent to receive his "will" as the *dicta* which must rule her conduct in life. She might not be right; but, as a truthful scribe, it is necessary to state the fact.

Meta was the first to break the painful silence. "I hope, dear Ellinor, you and Reginald will never tell Hugh that all his letters to me were intercepted, or that I had this illness in consequence of his marriage. Promise me, Ellinor. I would not have him know this."

"I think you are quite right, Meta; it would not be wise to tell him."

"No, he must never, never know what I have endured; but it is very hard to be so misunderstood."

Again she wept bitterly as she looked into the disconsolate chamber of her own heart, and thought how clean she must sweep it of its pervading image; because to leave it longer there would be sin.

"Do not grieve, dearest," said Ellinor, tearfully, as she knelt by her sister's couch to utter comforting words of sympathy and love.

"No, no, Ellinor; I will not be so foolish. Forgive me, and pray for me. Marian shall never know of this. Oh, to be his wife, and to think she

possesses not his whole, undivided heart, would kill her! She must never know he once loved me; and if ever I meet Hugh I shall not tell him how much he has been deceived."

"That is said like my own true Meta. It is the right course to pursue; for Hugh's sake, as well as dear Marian's, this sacrifice of feeling is absolutely necessary. You have indeed received a deep wound, but it is not mortal, and in a healthy nature like yours, must, in time, heal. Only try your best to bring this young life of yours, which you think so desolate, once more under the influence of human affection, and in God's good time a renewed existence of bliss and love will yet be yours."

"Never, Ellinor; do not think it! You allude to Lord Lilsdale. As a brother I could love him, as a friend reciprocate his friendship, but nothing more. I know the love which women owe to their husbands too well to dare to deceive Lord Lilsdale as to the nature of my feelings towards himself; and to be the wife of such a man, and give him only a poor, patched-up, broken heart like mine—never! never! Do not think I could be guilty of such wickedness."

"He has been here every day since your illness; in fact, I cannot tell you how kind and thoughtful he has been, or what we should have done without him. He was with Mrs. Mortimer when she died, and arranged everything for us afterwards. Oh, Meta! how is it you cannot learn to love him? He is one of the finest characters I ever knew—noble, disinterested, and generous!"

"All that I well know, but I could not love him as a wife. I could reverence him; as a friend he is perfect; as a husband I could not think of him; so pray, dear Ellinor, never mention the subject to me again. Lord Lilsdale and I quite understand each other, and he is content to have my friendship, and nothing more."

"Will you see him when he calls to-morrow? He is leaving Ashlee Court next week."

"Oh, yes! I shall be in the little parlour. It is time to make an effort, throw off this silly grief, and do my duty; I have plenty of work before me, unless—unless I starve."

Meta turned upon her couch, and wept bitterly. All her tears must flow now, because to-morrow she must be strong, and again at work.

"A repining spirit is surely the next step to the 'slough of Despond,'" said Meta an hour afterwards, when her tears had ceased to flow.

"And you should add, Meta, one of the wiles of Satan by which he sends us there. Uncontrolled grief is sin, whilst every effort made to subdue it is a victory gained over ourselves and our besetting Apollyon."

Yes, and it is by such efforts that the mind is braced for future trials.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE weeks passed slowly away as they always appear to do after the first excitement attending any great event in our lives has worn itself out.

Reginald and Ellinor had returned to London. Lord Lilsdale had left Ashlee Court for the Continent. The day before his departure he had a long interview with Meta, but what passed between them never transpired. Matthew Fielding saw him mount his horse and ride away with a pale care-worn face, and soon afterwards learnt that he had shut up Ashlee Court, leaving it to the care of a few domestics.

For months he roamed, a weary, isolated being, in foreign lands, determined to subdue his affection for Meta Raycliffe, whose love he had so long hoped to win by his own constancy. He was now, however, convinced that she could never be more to him than a friend, therefore it was evidently his duty to forget her as speedily as possible. He was thoroughly a domestic man, and longed for the sweet companionship of a wife, whilst he desired an heir to perpetuate his name; so Lord Lilsdale travelled fast and far, in order to forget his old love

and make way for a new one. Time will prove the result of his experiment.

Whilst he was thus employed, Meta sought refuge from painful thoughts in unremitting work. She was now perfectly strong, and could go through an amount of fatigue which surprised her dependants, and delighted Bridget, who was a martyr to industry, and consequently not a very popular individual in Meta's establishment. The Ashlee farm was considered a model for all the farmers in the neighbourhood. Lord Lilsdale had left particular instructions with his steward to see that all Miss Raycliffe's wants and wishes respecting improvements and other matters should be carefully attended to and carried out during his absence; and as Matthew Fielding was undoubtedly the best practical farmer in that part of the world, it was not surprising that Meta was rapidly realising a handsome income.

Four times a year in her quiet little parlour she made up her accounts, and when she reckoned her savings, lived for a brief space in the airy castle of her imagination, Holmlee—the ancient home of her fathers. Holmlee should, some day, return to the Raycliffes, and for that object she was content to toil on day after day. Already the Rookeses were tired of the old place, and were anxious to leave altogether, could they find a purchaser. And such, indeed, was the fact. Cecilia Rookes had seriously damaged the social position of her family by her own light behaviour as a "fast young lady." This, added to the presuming vulgarity of the Rookes family generally, had at last effectually barred against them

the doors of all the best houses in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Glenmore had done her best to launch them into society, but they could not maintain their ground, or fit into the fine mosaic of refined fashionable life. Their workmanship was clumsy; and, do what they would, they stood out in bold relief as vulgar people. Some one has said that music "is supposed to be produced by the heavenly bodies in their harmonious movements within the solar system." So it is in the system of "society." Each person must strike an accord: no blunder must be made, however trifling; the sweet melody of their lives must ever flow on to ravish the epicurean instincts of the fashionist, or discord and jar, which in polite society cannot be tolerated, will offend the fastidious ear. The Rookeses rarely struck an accord, and the qualities of their heads and hearts did not make up for their deficiency of manner. London was a far better arena for them than Abbots Thorpe. There, in middle-class reunions, they could be great people, boasting of their acquaintance with those lights of the aristocracy with whom they had been brought in contact during their fleeting transit through a London season under the Glenmore wing. Aristocratic people might politely endure the Rookes family once, but a second time, never. So the "what shall we do?" question had become serious. Should they go abroad, or fight out the battle at home? If they remained at home they sank into their native insignificance; whilst if they went abroad they might, through the introductions which Mrs. Glenmore would doubtless give them, obtain

a position in a new circle of society. Mrs. Glenmore heard the decision with delight, and promised to supply them with any number of letters, glad in this way to get rid of Cecilia, whose influence over Harcourt was daily increasing to an alarming extent. In fact, he had neither eyes nor ears for any one else when she was present; whilst Cecilia, regardless of consequences, either beguiled with honeyed words, or drove him to desperation by her indifference and flirtations with other men. They neither of them realised the sinfulness of their conduct, but to their own minds extenuated it by quarrelling with the fate which kept their lives apart. They were at the verge of the sinful abyss, for Harcourt had spoken of love, and had even bewailed his own fettered state in terms of the wildest passion.

Cecilia hated Gertrude, and had no pity for "the wife." "Cold, proud creature, let her suffer—she deserves her fate! I could love him, yes, adore him, whilst she, whining simpleton that she is, gives him what? goodness only knows, for I don't, except it be her wealth, which she thinks must cover every other defect!" Gertrude, too, had fired Cecilia's indignation by refusing to receive her upon terms of intimacy, a circumstance she made the most of to Harcourt, who passionately commanded his wife to show her every mark of respect, and receive her at home as an honoured guest. To this Gertrude would not assent, but continued to treat the whole Rookes family with haughty coolness. Poor Gertrude was miserable! She was pained by her husband's

conduct, whilst she still loved him, and could have forgiven and forgotten the past if he had shown the slightest inclination to reform. But the die was cast, and Harcourt could no more change his nature than the Ethiopian his skin.

Often, for weeks together, he would scarcely utter a word to Gertrude. So little did she see of him at those times, that the fact of being his wife seemed almost a dream.

Then Gertrude assumed a corresponding amount of indifference, and whilst her heart was ready to break with anguish, appeared to her husband and the world the gayest, the happiest of creatures. Such conduct, she fondly hoped, might prove an incentive to his love. She would be as indifferent as himself, never seek his attention, and thus pique his vanity; nay, more, she almost thought she would try to arouse his jealousy. But Gertrude might as well spare herself these pains. With some characters opposition or indifference are incentives to interest, if not to love; but with Harcourt the case was different. He was too gay, mercurial, and mentally idle to trouble himself with the thoughts, motives, or feelings of any human being, much less his wife, for whom he had not a spark of real affection.

So there was no tie of love between the hapless couple, and there was no child to draw together the two divided hearts, or to be a safeguard in their perilous, loveless home.

Gertrude wept bitter tears, and shuddered to think that even now the last spark of Harcourt's

affection had passed from her to fall upon the arid heart of a worthless girl like Cecilia Rookes.

"He hates me! I know it, I see it in every word and act!" she frequently exclaimed as she paced her lonely room at night, feeling herself utterly friendless in the midst of so-called friends. Not one thought arose of the Great Friend above, who is acquainted with all our griefs; so Gertrude nursed her bitter feelings, and whilst almost terrified to realise the indifference of her husband, made no effort to win his confidence, or reclaim him from his evil course by the silent eloquence of a sweetly forbearing disposition.

In return, Harcourt sought occasion to wound her feelings, and seemed to take a sullen pleasure in the pain and annoyance he produced. Mrs. Glenmore never interfered between them. She was at all times respectfully polite to her son's wife, whilst she adroitly intimated to her friends that she and Harcourt were martyrs to her fiery temper. At home Mrs. Glenmore still retained the reins of domestic government, quietly and unostentatiously, but with a power and force from which there seemed to be no appeal.

Gertrude longed to explain herself, but Mrs. Glenmore never afforded her the opportunity; indeed, her imperturbable calmness was Gertrude's greatest trial of temper. To do and say the most unpleasant and cutting things with the sweetest smile, the softest pressure of the hand, was Mrs. Glenmore's Machiavelian policy. When she had "snatched a grace beyond the rules of art," and

beamed most with amiability, it was to conceal the venom of her malevolent intentions.

To be treated with cool indifference, quietly ignored at home, and yet in public receive from Mrs. Glenmore the most affectionate attention, as "my son's wife" was so galling to Gertrude's high spirit, that often in the frenzy of her angry feelings she could have committed some fearful deed in order to convince both husband and mother that they must dare no longer to insult her with impunity. For hours she often paced her room trying to discover some method by which she could circumvent their plans, and then, terrified at the thoughts which whelmed upon her mind, would ring the bell for her maid, and dress for some gay party, deciding that the whirl of fashionable life was the best refuge from her husband, his mother, and herself.

Gertrude was admired, courted, and flattered by men; consequently, became the target at which worldly women levelled their arrows of envy and detraction.

Oh Fashion, Fashion! what a famine of the soul art thou! Heartless and corrupt!

Gertrude often realised this, and felt an inward yearning for a better, purer state of being—somewhere to be found, but where, or how, she did not know.

Since the memorable night of the masquerade ball at Abbots Thorpe, she had been confirmed in her suspicions of the treachery of Mr. Trapps, and the participation in it of Harcourt and his mother.

"Wrong cannot be right," she reasoned, "and a sinful course of fraud and injustice persevered in must demoralise the mind, pervert the feelings, and finally bring ruin. This is the secret of Harcourt's degeneracy. Once free him from the trammels of his mother, and release him from the burthen now lying upon his conscience, and Harcourt would surely improve in disposition, in character, and in self-respect."

But how was this to be done?

Gertrude asked herself the question with a beating heart, but with the determination to accomplish it.

For the present, however, she must wait. Nothing could be done in London; it was at Abbots Thorpe she must carry out her intention.

And whilst she thus brooded over her griefs, and the wrong done to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, Nemesis was at the Glenmore door, and the crisis at hand.

CHAPTER XXV.

WALKING along the Strand on a certain fine day, when the London season was at its height, you might have observed a couple whose quaint appearance and original comments upon persons and things would have inspired some degree of interest.

This couple was Thomas Rymer and his wife Nancy.

Thomas was dressed in his best array, and displayed a number of medals with a degree of pride and satisfaction which for the time being raised him, in his own estimation, to the level of the Great Duke himself.

One touch of nature, it is said, makes the whole world akin; and certainly the sympathies of noble souls are magnetic. Thomas Rymer had a noble soul. The Great Duke himself did not possess a braver heart or more patriotic love for dear Old England!

Thomas worshipped the hero of Waterloo, but as he walked the Strand that day, he thoroughly believed in *himself*, and in feeling claimed an undefined affinity to the Duke; and this more especially when he fancied the passers-by observed his medals.

Nancy was attired in newness from tip to toe, blue and red predominating gaily in her bonnet and shawl.

That bonnet was certainly a marvel in the Mantilini art! Assuredly it would have puzzled a west-end milliner, had a fac-simile been demanded at her hands; but Nancy's genuine bonny face, beaming from out its wealth of cheap ribbon and English blonde, redeemed its vulgarity, and even reconciled you to its curious shape. In fact, Nancy Rymer's bonnet, like a good rider's steed, became part and parcel of her own comely self.

Thomas was wonderfully great in London. Nancy looked at him proudly, and walked an inch higher as the extent of his knowledge dawned upon her. Still she was very undemonstrative, and Thomas marvelled much at her lukewarmness. He imagined Nancy would have been ecstatic, and have stood at the corners of streets and at shop-windows with her mouth open and her hands raised. No such thing—Nancy was calm and sedate. The fact was, she was disappointed. All her life she had pictured kings, queens, dukes, and lords, attired in red velvet and ermine. Every carriage she saw added to her discontent; for glass-carriages like the Lord Mayor's, and red velvet and ermine, came not to realise her dream of London's greatness.

Nancy began to cogitate, too. They had been to the theatre, the wax-works; they had seen the Tower and Westminster Abbey; they had been driven hither and thither at an awful expense—she must put a stop to such extravagance, as it was plain to be

seen Thomas quite forgot himself in London. Yes, she had heard it was an awful place: a certain unprepossessing gentleman always ready at the corner of every street with his forked tail to lead unwary folks to destruction! Nancy uttered a prayer, clung closer to her husband's arm, and determined to stop their downward career before it was too late.

Thomas was peering into a jeweller's window, casting a final glance upon a watch he was strongly tempted to purchase—only what would Nancy say?—when he observed that the finger of the opposite clock pointed "two."

"Nancy, we are late, we must hail yonder coach."

"Hail another coach, Thomas?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure!" he answered, shouting lustily to one passing at the moment.

"Nay, nay, Thomas, stay thy hand; surely London has demented thy wits. Another coach! the third to-day!"

Nancy raised her blue umbrella with a deprecatory gesture as she stood by the cab door.

"Oh! Thomas, Thomas! surely thou art going stark staring mad! Oh, that we had stayed at home and never come to this awful place! I always thought thee, Thomas, a Christian soldier, thrifty and wise; but London turns thy head, and makes thee forget thou wast ever born!"

"Get in, get in, Nancy!" said Thomas, testily, as he perceived a crowd around them, and that the cabman could not restrain his laughter.

"Where must I drive to?" asked the man.

"Drive to? Why to Miles Gorton's, Esquire,

No. 10, Eaton Square, to be sure!—where else would you drive to?"

"And be merciful to that poor nag," put in Nancy. "I wonder if it knows the smell of corn? Well, a merciful man is good to his beast; but this is London, and I've never seen a drop of cream or a pound of real good butter since I came!" *Sequiturs* formed no part of Nancy's mental organisation. "Now, man, how slow you are! Mount your box and take care how you drive; don't upset us. Country folk, Thomas, shouldn't be over humble to such like; if they are, be sure they will be put upon."

"Oh, yes! all very fine, Nancy, but thee are not up to doing things properly. The man only laughs at thee; never heed him. Nancy, it is a very grand house we are going to, so thee *must* put on thy best manners. And, Nancy, don't say all as thee thinks; it isn't the way in London; folks are different here, more trimmed up like, more polished, and they never say what they think, and only half they believe."

"Oh, Thomas! how can thee talk so? Surely thou art losing thy Christianity!" Nancy wept—at least, two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

Thomas was subdued by these in an instant, and diligently tried to explain his meaning. "I meant no harm, Nancy. I only wanted thee to understand that folks in London are different to country folks like ourselves; they are the same p'raps at the core, but they are polished up and brightened. Why, Nancy, thou hast often looked at that bit of unpolished

goold Master Hugh gave me, and said it were a pity it was so dull; well, it's same thing betwixt town folk and country folk as polished goold and unpolished goold."

"I see," replied Nancy, complacently. "I see, and will do my best not to disgrace thee, Thomas."

At length they arrived at Eaton Square. "It is a fine large house," said Nancy, after bidding "good day" to the cabman in order as she thought to make amends for her incivility.

Thomas twitched her shawl to prevent any further parley. "Thee need not say 'good day' to the cabman, or tell him t' house is big; them's not London manners; t' man only laughs at thee and thy country notions."

Nancy did not reply, but pursed up her lip, crossed her hands, which were encased in thick kid gloves, a man's size, and taking another survey of the house, ascended the steps.

"Well, fortune's freaks *are* wonderful, Thomas! Only think of this being Miles Gorton's house. Why, he has played with me many a time and oft in his youth," said Nancy, proudly; "ay, and I'll remind him of it too; it will make us better friends."

"Nay, nay, Nancy, thee must not do that, it would be height of bad manners. We are different to him now; mind you say nought about it."

At this moment the door was opened, and Nancy was at once subdued by the grave, and to her gentlemanly bearing of the footman who stood before them. A glance, too, at the interior obliterated the remembrance of previous equality with its master, whilst it

exalted him into one of the greatest and grandest men in London. From that moment she never alluded to her supposed early intimacy with Miles Gorton.

They were expected visitors, for Thomas had written a note to Hugh to say they should call on that day, and at that hour. The footman therefore readily admitted them, and however surprised and amused at their comical appearance, ushered them with bland dignity into his master's study, where he awaited their arrival.

It was a splendid room, filled with valuable books, busts and bronzes, and antique furniture. Hugh had copied his grandfather's study at Abbots Thorpe as nearly as possible. Miles Gorton, with his usual kind forethought, had set apart one portion of the house for the exclusive use of the young couple. Hugh had furnished a study after his own peculiar taste, and the result was so satisfactory to Miles Gorton's refined and fastidious ideas, that he often declared he would take forcible possession of it in preference to his own much-used and well-littered library.

Evidences of Hugh's handiwork adorned the room in many places; for his old occupation of carving and modelling had since his marriage been resumed with avidity, especially when he found his little wife a coadjutor in the art, and a very apt scholar.

Hugh sat at his table turning the litter of pamphlets, papers, reports of charitable institutions, &c., over and over in search of something. At last he found it—a large and very unartistic letter, sealed

with the top of a thimble. Hugh smiled at the straggling misshapen letters, and then as carefully refolded it as if it had been a *billet-doux* from the lady of his love.

He had just completed the process, and pocketed Thomas Rymer's letter, when he and Nancy were announced.

Hugh welcomed them with delight. Seats were placed by the officious servant, who marvelled to witness the affectionate cordiality of his master to people like them.

"Oh, Thomas, I am glad to see you, and dear Nancy too! You are the first Abbots Thorpe people I have seen for four years."

Tears started into Thomas Rymer's eyes as he suddenly remembered that Hugh had not written to him once during that time. Not for worlds would he have alluded to the fact at that moment.

Their interview was long, for Hugh lingered with strange fascination over all they said concerning Abbots Thorpe; he could not hear enough. Every place, every family, every person, with one exception, and that was Meta Raycliffe, was talked about and discussed.

Why did he not ask after Meta? He did not know, nor did he ask himself the question, although he felt that the angel of her presence, whilst he talked of others, seemed to hover around everything and every one. It was, however, to Hugh, a spiritual presence — something which, in its airy flight above his head, he could admire, but whose touch and materiality he cared not to possess.

Thomas and Nancy had just completed their last sip at the sherry and enjoyed their last morsel of plum-cake. Thomas was unused to wine, and Hugh had insisted upon a third glass. "*In vino veritas;*" Thomas had something upon his mind, so that last glass brought it to the tip of his tongue, whence, regardless of consequences, he blurted it forth.

"Oh, Master Hugh! how could you marry and forsake our Miss Raycliffe? The news of your marriage went near to kill her. She went out of her mind for a whole week, and we thought we should have lost her, poor darling!"

Hugh's face flushed to the very roots of his hair. He turned uneasily upon his chair, and discovered his wife emerging from behind the screen which was placed before the door.

She entered, pale as death, but perfectly composed.

Poor Hugh suffered torture, for he felt certain Marian must have heard Thomas Rymer's unfortunate remark.

Thomas was flushed and confused, for, after the outburst, he felt conscious of having done wrong.

"Marian, let me present to you some kind and dear old friends of mine — Thomas and Nancy Rymer," said Hugh, with an effort to recover calmness.

"Your friends, dear Hugh, are always my welcome guests," she replied with a gentle smile, which was instantly followed by a sigh, inexpressibly sad, as she extended her little white hand, first to Nancy, and then to Thomas Rymer. "I intruded upon

you, Hugh, because I wished to be introduced to your friends, and to ask if I could be of any service to them."

The Rymers were lost in admiration of Marian's beauty. No wonder Master Hugh had forgotten Meta Raycliffe! Her strangely spiritual style of beauty awed them, and whilst they admired, they were silenced by it.

Marian tried every gentle womanly art to propitiate Nancy, and to induce her to converse with freedom. It was in vain; and as Hugh perceived that the conversation flagged more and more, and that Marian grew paler every moment with the effort she was making to entertain his friends, he looked at the time-piece, and broke up the interview by saying he had an engagement at three o'clock. Marian took advantage of the move, and after expressing a wish to be of use to them, and inviting them to spend a few days in Eaton Square before they returned home, quietly withdrew. Presently Hugh followed, to say a few parting words before he quitted the house.

"Thank you, thank you, Marian, for your kindness to the Rymers! You were most kind, most considerate, especially as to you, who do not know them, they must simply be bores."

"I know you value them, and they love you; therefore, as *your* friends, it was my duty to treat them with every mark of respect," replied Marian, with unusual coldness.

"Dear Marian, you are not vexed with me, are you?"

"No, Hugh," replied Marian.

"Then kiss me, love! I shall be back again in two hours. Now, promise me you will lie down. How tired you look! Do let me take you to your room, where you can rest!"

Passively she allowed her husband to pass his arm around her waist, and lead her forth as a child.

"There! you must be quiet until I return!" said Hugh, beaming love and tenderness upon his young wife as he arranged the *couvre-pied* and placed the pillows beneath her head. Then he knelt by her side, and tried every affectionate device to win back his Marian's smile, and give her faith in his love.

This was needless, for in his presence she always forgot to doubt: his devotion and manly forbearance were such she could not do otherwise. It was when alone the shadow returned and stood between them. Unfortunately, she had now more poisonous food upon which to live, for as she had entered Hugh's study that day, she had overheard Thomas Rymer's indignant allusion to Meta Raycliffe. She was too proud to ask an explanation, but it rankled deeply in her breast, and gave additional weight to those dreadful anonymous letters, turning her life of joy and love into one of sorrow, suspicion, and mistrust.

Hugh attempted no explanation. If Marian had heard the remark she would be certain to allude to it; and if she had not, then it was far wiser not to name it, especially at this critical period, for she was

daily expecting to become a mother. So Hugh kept silence, and remained with his wife until she was perfectly composed, and could return his affectionate "good-bye" with a smile, which now seemed always to beam upon him like some bright lone star in the wilderness of this world, to guide him onwards, upwards, to scenes of happiness and joy beyond!"

Hugh was about to leave, and Marian nestled more closely to his side.

"Every word you say, Hugh, does me good," she whispered, laying her head upon his shoulder. "You seem to help and strengthen me; and I'm so weak—weak-minded!"

"Not 'weak-minded,' dearest! that is not the word; you should say 'so timid!' But I like it; I like to feel that my wife clings to me for help, protection—for everything! A strong-minded, bony woman—bah! I could not endure her. Another 'good-bye,' and then I'm off."

"Wait half a moment; don't be so impatient," said Marian, clinging closer, and holding his hand fast in hers.

"Tell me, Hugh, before you go, have you heard from papa to-day? When does he return? I never see him now."

"I had a few lines upon business this morning; he sends his love to you, and says we are not to expect him until the middle of next week. He is now fully launched upon the sea of politics; he is a public man, Marian, so you must expect to see very little of him, and to read in the papers a great

amount of information concerning him entirely new to you."

"And what will it all end in, Hugh? Is he a public man for the sake of his country, or to satisfy ambition? Oh! I hope and trust not the latter," she added, tearfully, "for if it be so he will never again know real happiness."

"You are not well, Marian, and take a gloomy view of things. Don't you remember telling me that I must be ambitious, and become a representative man? Then why not our father, who is so clear-headed, astute, and well fitted to shine in public life? We will discuss the question another time. A kiss, dearest, and then away; the Rymers will think I have forgotten them."

The kiss was given with a sunny smile. Hugh was happy, and returned with a brightened countenance to his humble friends.

"Now, then, Mrs. Nancy, are you ready?" he asked. "The car is at the door, and I shall take you to my friend, Mrs. Beamish; she will look after your interests and make you comfortable."

"But the luggage, sir?"

"Oh! never mind the luggage, it must be sent after you; Joey will attend to that."

"Oh! those lodgings! I think I should have died if I must have slept there another night! Thomas and I never had a wink of sleep all night. I don't like London at all," added Nancy, abruptly; "and let me once get to my own ingle and these parts never see *me* more!"

Hugh laughed, and Thomas begged him to excuse

his wife's "queer temper." "I know you will, Master Hugh, when I tell you Nancy has never been 'sweet' with me since we came to London. Smoke, I suppose, don't agree with her constitution."

Hugh had previously arranged matters with his old landlady, Mrs. Beamish, who, in her best attire, stood at the parlour window ready to receive them. They were to be her guests, at Hugh's expense, for a week. It was a pleasant change for Mrs. Beamish, and relieved the monotony of her every-day life. She could talk about her "dear departed Beamish," weep before his picture, and extol that "gospel man" whom she now "sat under," to her heart's content. It would be all new to them; Joey was tired of the subject, and yawned desperately when she tried her conversational powers upon him. Joey Binks still continued to live with Mrs. Beamish, and paid for his small attic like a man. He was errand boy in Miles Gorton's firm, and received a salary. Joey was wonderfully improved, and was fast picking up an useful education at the neighbouring night-school. Some day—who knows?—Joey Binks may be Lord Mayor of London!

Hugh remained for a short chat with Mrs. Beamish, and then left them already excellent friends, and prepared to enjoy a cosy tea in the best parlour, beneath the benign glance of "dear departed Beamish!"

Mrs. Beamish celebrated all her "sensation" tea-parties in that room. It was there, inspired by the

"hintellectual brow" of her husband that her conversation flowed most smoothly, oiled by the pious unction imparted to it by the preaching of her latest favourite, the popular Mr. Frothly.

Here for the present we shall bid adieu to the Rymers, and proceed with our tale.

CHAPTER XXVI.

After Hugh's departure Marian again sank into painful thought. In vain she tried to forget the anonymous letters and Thomas Rymer's remark. "I will not think! It all means nothing! Hugh loves me, and all will yet be well. It is strange, too—a wonderful coincidence! Ellinor told me how ill Meta Raycliffe had been. The letter said she was dying in consequence of Hugh's perfidy; and to-day that remark from Thomas Rymer! Oh, Hugh, Hugh! why don't you open your heart and tell me all? I could forgive, even if he owned he did not love me and had married me for money. But no, shame upon me for such a thought! he is too good and noble for that. Shall I tell him all? confess everything? No, no, not for worlds! Papa, too, might hear of it, and then—oh! I dare not think of the consequences!"

Marian tried to divert her painful thoughts by occupation. She would read a chapter in the Bible; that would turn her mind to better things. The fourteenth of St. John, "In my Father's house are many mansions," &c. She raised her tearful eyes to heaven—"should she be in one of those

blessed mansions far above the sky before that day week?" A little shudder passed over her frame—"perhaps she was not worthy of one." The thought was very solemn. She tried to draw up her mind heavenward in order to test her ground of hope.

The chapter ended, Marian walked into the bedroom set ready for her use at no distant day. She opened the drawers to rearrange the wardrobe of tiny clothes prepared for the expected little one. Gradually tears gave place to smiles. Among the lovely little row of shirts she found two with the lace "uncrimped." That must not be. She drew them forth, and seated herself opposite the Nautilus-shaped cot, penknife in hand, ready to repair the neglect.

Most of Marian's baby's clothes had been made by herself. The materials were costly, and the workmanship exquisite; only delicate fingers like hers could achieve such tiny marvels in the art of sewing.

As she sat there crimping, and putting the finishing touches upon her handiwork, how pretty she looked, her countenance sweetly blending the expression of child and mother. Her deep liquid eyes and smiling mouth looked pensive but happy; sorrow and suspicion had given place to joy and trust, whilst she thought she should never again be so wicked as to suspect her good, kind Hugh. She pictured the future—her husband, their child, a sweet baby—would it be a boy or girl?—her father, and herself. What kisses there would be for its soft cheeks! "Oh! if it were only here!" thought

she, as flushed with excitement she indented the frilled pillow at the head of the cot, and pictured a little cherub face lying there, and she, its mother, watching over the sleeping form.

"What delight it will be to see Hugh and papa nursing the baby." Three taps at the door. "Come in," said Marian, cheerfully. Jessie appeared, smiling as usual, and carrying a salver covered with notes and papers.

"The post has just arrived, ma'am."

"Place them on the table in my boudoir, I am returning there in a moment."

Jessie left the room with the letters, and Marian followed immediately afterwards.

There was one letter lying among them which made her shudder. Should she look at it, or cast it into the fire? No, she would read it; after all it might not be one of those dreadful letters. "I am so weak and fanciful," she said, as she tried to reassure herself before breaking the seal. Her fingers trembled, and her heart seemed to die within her as she opened the note and read the following effusion:—

"Gentle Lady,

"Again I, your unknown but true friend, address you. Half an hour ago I saw your husband with two people of vile character, Thomas Rymer and his wife. They were stepping into a cab at your own door. Why does your husband cultivate the acquaintance of low people like the Rymers? I will tell you why. That he may hear

of his old love, Meta Raycliffe, and that through them he may send vows of eternal constancy.

"Don't believe him when he tells you he loves and adores you. No such thing—he loves Meta Raycliffe, and only married you, his rich cousin, because he was a beggar, and Meta Raycliffe as poor as himself. Then, too, do you know anything about the Raycliffe curse? You are cursed by the Raycliffes because you married an Ethelstone, and if you have a baby you will die—die—die! Every Ethelstone's wife has died in childbed since the days of old Richard Raycliffe, who cursed them to all eternity, and that was in the year of grace 1538. Your husband is a bad man, a scoundrel, and deserves the contempt of the world for his shameless conduct. He knows you will die in childbed. It is true; send to Abbots Thorpe, and there you will receive confirmation of what I now tell you.

"With true pity for your sad condition, ever believe me your sincere friend,

"A WELL-WISHER."

Poor little Marian! This last blow has been too severe. Cold, colourless as marble, she sat gazing upon the dreadful letter; her eyes wildly starting, and her parted lips drawn into an intense expression of horror over her pearly teeth. She neither shrieked nor fainted, but remained as motionless as a statue. For half an hour she sat thus. Then she quietly re-read the letter, folded it, and carried it with her to the door. She turned the key in the lock, and then with the same white face and painful

expression, quietly, but with surprising method, emptied her davenport, her drawers, and her jewel box. The papers she carefully endorsed, strapped together, and replaced in the davenport.

Then she made a list of her jewels, and other articles which she valued, and wrote her wishes respecting their distribution after death. In a small casket lay a crushed faded rose; she drew it forth, pressed it convulsively to her breast, her lips, and her brow, rocking to and fro upon her chair. All this time not a word, a tear, or a sigh escaped; she was awfully calm.

The rose was Hugh's first lover's gift to his sweet Marian. Oh, had he been there at that moment, what grief, what misery might have been averted! But it was not to be.

Again the hideous letter was drawn forth and re-read. After this third reading, Marian threw it into the fire, and watched the paper as it shrivelled up into a contortion suggestive of human agony when paying the penalty of sin in the burning lake. Many a child has thought this thought when watching a burning piece of paper, and Marian was still a child in years and ideas too, upon many subjects.

She waited until every particle had disappeared, and then knelt down and prayed. Gradually her eyes lost their strained expression, and her mouth resumed its dimpled loveliness. Peace had come to this fair scene and smiled upon her! Heaven opened and revealed "The Crown" ready for every believer's head! Ah! revelations such as these come not to the worldly wise, the Laodicean Christian, the "truly

pious" hypocrite, or the mere formal worshipper! No, such *Christianity* will not bring the peace which then dawned upon Marian's soul.

At last Marian rang the bell for Jessie. She would dress and be ready to meet her husband at dinner. Still the same unnatural calmness. Would that she could weep!

"Here is a note, ma'am, from master, to be delivered immediately. Joey Binks has just brought it, and waits for an answer."

Marian read the note; it merely contained a few affectionate lines expressive of Hugh's sorrow at not being able to return home that day in time for dinner. "Send word, dearest, by Joey Binks, how you feel. I will be with you as early in the evening as possible." Marian sat down and wrote a short reply.

Jessie took the note and quickly returned; she had observed something in the face and manner of her mistress which alarmed her. When she came back Marian had fainted, and neither Mrs. Crawford nor Jessie could arouse her from the stupor into which she had fallen. The excitement of the domestics added to the confusion. Mrs. Crawford was too frightened to think, and poor Marian must have died before real assistance had been forthcoming had not the butler, a man of good sense and judgment, happily been in the house to restore confidence and order by the active measures he at once adopted. Mr. Ritchie, the butler, was a married man, and was Miles Gorton's servant at the time of Marian's birth; he loved his young mistress as dearly as his own daughter.

At length Hugh arrived, haggard with grief, for, careless of his feelings, the messenger had told him his wife was dying. When he looked upon her marble face, a cold chill struck upon his heart, and he believed it was so. She lay in the room she had so recently left, her young heart beating high in the joy of expected maternity.

Two surgeons and a physician were called in by Hugh. At last the restoratives began to take effect, and Marian showed signs of returning animation. In two hours she had quite recovered from the fainting fit, but only to enter upon that period of sorrow and suffering entailed upon womankind since the days of Eve.

Mr. Gorton had been sent for, but could not possibly arrive until the following evening. Marian was very ill.

Hugh had once, at the side of his grandfather's deathbed, gone through an agony of grief, but what was that compared to his sufferings now?

Before morning he had gazed upon his child, a little girl with lusty lungs and strong limbs. The nurse, of course, said she was "a beauty, and so very like her papa;" but what cared Hugh at that moment for the innocent cause of so much sorrow!

How he begged to be admitted into his wife's room! The doctors said "no," and declared it would be as much as Mrs. Ethelstone's life was worth to grant the permission; she must be kept perfectly quiet and composed. She rambled, they said, constantly upon death. Had Mrs. Ethelstone received any severe mental shock the day of her illness?

Every one said she had not, and Hugh could only recall Thomas Rymer's ill-judged remark, which his wife might possibly have overheard, but which surely could not have produced such disastrous results.

It was the afternoon of the following day, and Hugh had not yet been permitted to see his wife. He was alone in his study, for Ellinor Raycliffe had just left him to return to Marian's sick room. He was prostrate with grief and anxiety; large tears coursed each other down his cheeks as he paced the room with hurried uncertain steps.

"It is useless to detain me here longer. Go to Marian I will—I must, whatever they say to the contrary."

Whilst Hugh was thus resolving, the door opened to admit the physician and surgeons. In an instant he divined the purport of their visit; but, like a drowning man catches at a straw, he still clung to hope, and waited for them to speak.

Calmly, and with as much consideration for his feelings as possible, they told him nothing more could be done for his wife, and a few hours would realise their worst fears.

"My God, my God, be merciful!" uttered Hugh, in tones so heartrending that even the usually undemonstrative Dr. Woods wept.

"Gentlemen, I now no longer ask your permission, but assert my right to be with my wife." He passed out of the door to his dressing-room, and knelt down to pray.

Once, twice, nay, thrice he prayed, but no comfort

came, because Hugh was at war with himself, and rebelled at God's decree.

His loved, his adored wife to be taken now in the flower of her youth! The desire of his eyes removed at a stroke! no, no, no!

Oh, wicked rebellious heart, why pray, when every word you utter conveys a reproach to God? Why like Job, cast yourself upon the ground, and with outstretched arms call loudly upon the Creator, when unlike him, you are not willing to submit? No, Hugh was not submissive yet, so peace came not into his soul, but went to fairer scenes, leaving him desolate, with the darkness of his affliction thickened, and his very soul appalled. He arose from his knees very little comforted, and went to his wife's room.

"Hugh! Hugh, my husband! Come to me; I'm dying! Cruel Hugh! Did you kill me? Oh, why, why? What harm had I done? I loved you, oh, so much! Ethelstones' wives all die in childbed —die, die, die! You know it! Oh, why did you not tell me so? Hugh, I could have died for you; but it was cruel not to tell me—cruel, cruel, cruel! and I die, die, die!"

Hugh staggered to the bedside with every limb shaking beneath him. Ellinor knelt by Marian's side, and tried in vain to hold captive the little hands, which were so wildly flung above her head.

Could that indeed be Marian's voice, and those her words? Hugh felt shocked and stricken to the very heart. For years he had forgotten the Raycliffe curse. "What wretch bereft of feeling had poisoned his wife's mind?" In a moment Hugh's

manly nature reasserted itself. What though his very soul was wrung within him, he must be a man; forget himself, and smooth the dying pillow of his Marian with words of comfort and love.

"Leave us, dear Mrs. Raycliffe! Clear the room. I would be alone with my wife," he whispered.

"The curse, Hugh!—the curse! Must I die?" He bent over Marian's pillow, and drew her slight form to his breast. "My own, my very own Hugh!" smiled Marian, with her peculiar look of childish love and trust beaming upon her face.

"Darling Marian! darling wife! You love me, I know. You have been very ill, but are a little better now. I should have been with you all the time, but we feared to excite you. Will you promise me to be very quiet, or the doctors will send me away from you again?"

"Very quiet; but you must not leave me, Hugh!" said Marian, shuddering. "The valley lies before me; and oh, Hugh! it is so dark at the beginning; but such a light comes streaming down! That light is the brightness of God's love! I love you, Hugh; but there are no marriages in Heaven. And why should there be, when all space will be swallowed up in Love?"

But what words can tell all that passed between them? what kisses, what forgivenesses were exchanged? secret prayers, prodigal expressions of tenderness, passionate avowals and utterances, so thrilling and sweet? For ever, ay! for ever, would they linger in the holiest sanctuary of Hugh's breast, never to die away, but like the fragrant rose,

dried and unrecognisable, still leave the perfume of their presence constantly with him!

By little and little he learnt from his wife all the sorrow caused by those diabolical letters; not a thought or feeling did she withhold. Her jealousy of Meta Raycliffe, and her struggles to overcome it, were all confessed.

Hugh could not reply; the darkest despair is often the most silent.

"Speak to me, Hugh! tell me you love me—love me; have ever loved me, and will always love me!"

He could not speak, but pressed her closer to him and fondly kissed her lips.

"Do not weep, love; it is good to die young! Oh, I escape many temptations! Hugh, I have one request to make before I die; nay, hush! I'll wipe away your tears. See, I don't cry, because I am so happy. *You* love me, and I go to heaven. Hush, hush! or I shall not have time."

Marian's eyes were bright still, but their expression was already changed. Hugh observed it with intense emotion.

"Look, darling husband! here is the rose you gave me when we fixed our marriage-day; let it lie upon my heart when—always!" Marian ceased to speak, and panted for breath.

"Papa! papa! God bless you! You do not know your Marian is dying, or you would be here; but we meet in heaven. And Meta? Hugh, promise me to marry Meta Raycliffe; she loves you. She is good, and will make you happy. Perhaps I

may be your angel—*hers* too when I go hence! Promise me, Hugh! promise, promise—"

Her eyes shone with unearthly beauty, and Hugh rang the bell. Ellinor, Mrs. Crawford, and the domestics gathered around the bed. There was awful silence—Marian was dying!

But what noise is that? A strong man taking three strides at once up the stairs. It is Miles Gorton; and Marian recognised him with an unmistakable smile of tenderness.

Miles Gorton neither wept nor spoke; but Hugh and Ellinor feared he would have a fit.

Marian still lay in her husband's arms, and held her father's hand.

"Bless you all! Give your hearts to heavenly things. Bless you—I love—all—don't grieve for —me——"

The hour struck; it was midnight. Marian's voice was still firm, and she looked like one of Perugino's Madonnas. The same rapturous expression, the same fulness of holy joy beamed upon her face, and seemed to fill the room with the halo of its presence. Hugh thought he felt the wafting of an angel's wing above their heads, waiting to bear his loved one to the sky.

Once again Marian's eyes opened; a smile parted her lips; the shadow fell, and Hugh's wife had gone!

Two strong, manly hearts crushed with grief! They gazed long, but tearlessly, and then, in the abandonment of their great sorrow turned their looks in dismay upon each other. Hand joined in

hand, in unity of grief, they knelt by the bedside, alone with their loved one; for, out of respect to their feelings, all had withdrawn.

"My son, my son! heaven help us! What shall we do without her?"

Words acted like a talisman upon their bursting hearts, and they wept bitterly.

"Do not grieve, sir! Marian told us not. Oh, my more than father, let me indeed be your son, to comfort and support you in this hour of trial." Hugh forgot his own trouble in pity for the father. He wiped the tears from Miles Gorton's face, and kissed him as a very child.

"My boy! my boy! you love me, and will still indeed be my son. She wished it!"

"Yea! till death! through good and evil, through time and through eternity! I swear it in the presence of our loved one!"

Ellinor came, and with quiet, gentle force led them forth from the chamber of death.

Hugh could not leave his father. They turned, as if by mutual consent, into Marian's boudoir. What a bond of union there is in grief! and, alas, what a terrible reality! Why did they seek that room? Was it with a vague idea of witnessing some change even there? No, no; there was no change in those impassive things! They were as she had left them. The footstool, a small sewing-chair, the books, and writing-desk, her birds and flowers; nay, even the little shirts she had carried there to crimp. At the sight of them their tears flowed afresh. Marian's presence was palpable there; the very rustle of her

dress, and her footsteps upon the carpet. Hugh rushed from the room, heedless whither he went, because he felt as though his heart must break at the sight of these things.

Ah, how painful the unchangeableness of impassive things in times of sore affliction! Who among us has not gazed from the window at dawn of day, when the spirit of a loved one has just fled, and wondered to see the sun rise up again from out the east? wondered that cows could ruminate so unconcernedly, and that trees should so merrily glisten in the sun? Ah! who has not felt at such times that Nature is no sympathising friend? Alas! that in our grief we should stretch out the bleeding tendrils of our breaking heart for comfort and support to the things of earth, and find, to our sorrow, that the world is just the same—indifferent ever, though we live or die! The lesson is salutary, if we only read it by the light of God's truth!

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARIAN was laid in the graveyard of Abbots Thorpe church. To describe the grief of Hugh and Miles Gorton when they left her there, would fill a book. And why harrow the feelings, or open afresh some wound filmed over by the hand of time in the breast of every reader? for who among us has not had to leave in the cold earth one dearer to him, perhaps, than life itself?

Miles Gorton returned to London immediately after the funeral. Hugh remained at Abbots Thorpe that first night of his Marian's sleep in the strange cold ground, far away from the happy home of her girlish days. He could not leave the spot. Old faces and kind friends, the Leslies first and foremost, crowded round him, but Hugh was speechless with grief, and all felt that even to look upon such sorrow was an intrusion, and that solitude was his best companion.

Before break of day he was again at his wife's grave to bid a final farewell. He passed near the quaint gables of Abbots Thorpe, and the ancient house of the Raycliffes, with scarcely a thought or

care but for Marian. Her life, her love for him, and her death with its fearful cause haunted him. The Curse! the Raycliffe Curse! did it still cling to him, disinherited as he was, and not possessing a single shilling from its broad lands? No, it could not be! Heaven and justice condemned the thought. It was not the curse which had killed Marian, but excitement—the child, too, was a pledge of that, for was it not a girl?—the first born to the Ethelstones for generations. Trapps, the vile calumniator, the miserable thief, had not only deprived him of his inheritance, but killed his wife! Revenge! Oh, Revenge would be sweet! Hugh ground his teeth, clenched his hand, and vowed over that newly-made grave to bring the miscreant to justice. Then, ashamed of his outburst, he knelt upon the grave in utter despair, crying aloud, "Forgive! oh, Father, forgive!"

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!" A voice like unto Marian's spoke the still words of conscience into his ear. Hugh listened; the angel of her presence was with him, and he rose up comforted. Life was before him in all its busy reality; he had an object, and he must attain it—to reclaim his lost inheritance, to make restitution, and to bring the guilty to justice. The curse—why should he fear it? A girl was born to him healthy and strong—the promise of a future life, free from the curse which had embittered the hearts and homes of his forefathers.

Had his child been a boy he might have believed in the perpetuation of the curse; but here was a girl (Theodora, the gift of God), the first in his family

since the days of the eighth Henry. And whilst Hugh was thus communing, bracing himself as it were for the future, Meta Raycliffe had come forth in the early morn to weep at his wife's grave, and to plant the fresh flowers she carried with her.

Meta was now a calm, trustful woman, serene in her path of duty. She sympathised deeply with Hugh, as she hastened to adorn his wife's grave with reverent hands and sisterly love. Could tears and deep regret have brought back his gentle Marian to his arms, surely Meta's would have been effectual. Selfishness formed no part of her character, and whilst she judged herself severely, she had learnt to look with deep compassion and benign liberality upon the sufferings and shortcomings of others. Even Reginald's failings had gradually faded from her mind, and she now regarded him with the loving and partial eyes of her youthful days, when his look or word ruled her daily life.

Hugh had just breathed his last farewell over his wife's grave, and had turned to gaze upon the old church he loved so dearly. The gush of thought was too much for his feelings, and he wept bitterly. The fresh morning air cooled his heated brow and refreshed him. What a lovely morning it was, so balmy, verdant, and rich in scent! But there always is a peculiar sweetness in the early morning air. Perhaps it is the breath of angels which makes it so, untainted as yet by the impurity of an awakened world.

As Meta walked up the lane, and passed the stately Abbots Thorpe on her way to the church, the balmy

loveliness of the morning suggested that thought. "Who, to look upon this lovely scene, could believe there is so much sorrow in the world?" she asked herself.

Meta reached the newly-made grave; it was close to the one which contained Hugh's parents. The slab was already upon it, with a simple cross at the head in fine Caen stone. "Sacred to the memory of Marian, the beloved wife of Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, who died June 10th, 18—, in the 18th year of her age." This was the only inscription—perfect simplicity, in accordance with Hugh's feelings, and the meek gentleness of her he mourned. Meta was struck by it, and appreciated the taste which had actuated its design.

"In just such a place, and with only the dear emblem of my faith above my head, should I like to be buried, for art decks no grave so beautifully as nature," thought Meta, as she knelt down, and with streaming eyes hung her chaplet upon the cross. This done, she commenced to prepare the ground for the flowers she intended to plant. Whilst at work, more than once she fancied she heard a deep sob. "What can it mean?" she asked herself; "there cannot be any one here at this early hour; with the exception of a few cow-herds and early labourers, the whole village is asleep." Again a sob. Meta paused, looked round, but saw no one.

"This is really silly, but I will convince myself I am alone."

She rose and walked quickly along the pathway to the other side of the church, and at the corner met

Hugh hurriedly leaving the spot, as if afraid to trust himself longer amid scenes so painfully suggestive.

There was no retreat for either of them, and their mutual surprise for the moment rendered them powerless to act or speak. Meta drew back embarrassed and uncertain, and with an expression of suffering upon her fair, frank face. Could it be Hugh, really Hugh, or his spirit, hovering over the grave of her he loved?

Meta had some peculiar and perhaps visionary notions upon the influence which mind exercised over matter. If questioned closely she might have confessed that she believed human beings possessed a spiritual essence of themselves, governed by a mentality strong enough to endow it with powers of volition unknown to the grosser or more fleshly part of our nature. This idea flashed upon her mind as she stood there face to face with Hugh. This might be *his* spiritual being, projected to the place where his treasure lay by the agony of his afflicted mind!

"Hugh—Hugh Atheling Ethelstone!" she exclaimed. "Is it, can it really be you?"

"Meta! Meta Raycliffe, at my wife's grave! Why are you here, Miss Raycliffe?" he asked, almost sternly. "Is it not enough that I and my wife have paid the penalty your family have laid upon the Ethelstones for generations? She is gone! She is dead! What would you more? And I am left, as my forefathers, with my *one* child, forsaken by all, and—and cursed still! Oh! how can I tear myself away! To leave her here in this cold, cold

ground with only these heartless Ethelstones and cursing Raycliffes near her. Oh! Marian, Marian, my loved one, I cannot leave you thus!"

"It is, indeed, hard to part; I am sure of it, Hugh."

Meta fixed her quiet earnest eyes upon his face, a tear rising into them as she replied to his taunt with compassionate tenderness. Whilst she spoke she placed her hand timidly (for she had soon discovered her mistake as to a spiritual presence) upon his arm, and looked up into his face with grave concern.

"But, Hugh, you are not forsaken, God is with you; He is especially present with the afflicted; it is only the inflated worldling who is 'let alone' by Him." The reproving but gentle voice calmed him. Meta quietly put her arm through his and led him to the grave-side of his wife.

"Oh, Hugh, could you—would you wish to call her back to this world, when you and I, young as we both are, have learnt that there is a bitter cup called the 'experience of life,' which we must all, sooner or later, if we live long enough, drink to the dregs! That cup your Marian never tasted; let that comfort you; she has been spared much sorrow, and now is blessed, whilst we, you and I, live to be tempted, tried, and perhaps fall from our heavenly inheritance to the lower depths beneath. Think of this, Hugh, and raise your thoughts to Him who sits enthroned listening with a loving smile to the angelic choir of which your Marian now forms one. Hugh, Hugh, your wife has but gone before us!

Let us learn to submit meekly, and then a heavenly reward like unto Marian's shall be ours."

Tears streamed from their eyes down upon the stone. Truly, Marian's young grave was watered with loving tears! Better die young as she, and be so regretted, than grow old, wear out sympathy, and be buried deep with every eye bright and tearless around our tomb!

"But," replied Hugh, "I have not your faith, Meta, or your religion, to fall back upon. Mine, alas! has not borne the test; my house was built upon sand; the wind came, the rain fell, and here is the wreck—disinherited, wifeless, and cursed! I might be wicked enough, if Job's wife were here, to take her advice, and——"

"No, no, never, Hugh! Utter not the fearful words—you are distracted with grief, and know not what you say—to-morrow you will think differently and make your peace with God. Oh, Hugh! I have gone through it all—it is a trial! You know Satan was permitted even to tempt the Saviour Himself: he is now tempting you; resist him bravely and he will flee from you. Pardon me, Hugh, if I say too much, but I claim a sister's privilege and speak plainly. But see, the village is now astir, and we shall soon be observed." Again Meta put her arm through his and led him forth from the churchyard.

Once outside and in the long lane which led to Holmlee and Abbots Thorpe, Hugh's feelings recovered their manly tone, and the singularity of his present position struck him forcibly. It was almost

with a pang that he realised the fact of his meeting with Meta Raycliffe, the idol of his boyish dream of love. Was it not almost an insult to his wife's memory to walk and talk to her thus? If she could look down upon him now, would it be with a smile? "But, thank God, the dream is passed long ago. I can love Meta as a brother—another lives in my affections"—that other whom he could never forget or cease to love.

"But what," he asked himself, "were Meta's feelings fowards himself?" Thomas Rymer had enlightened him as to her illness at the time of his marriage, declared her repeated refusals of Lord Lilsdale, and explained the mystery of her silence after he quitted Abbots Thorpe.

All this had been done, and Meta vindicated from the charge of heartless insincerity, yet Hugh believed she could now never be more to him than a sister.

"It is evident, too, from her manner," he thought, "that she has overcome her affection for me, and only now regards me in the light of a friend, or, at the most, has a sort of sisterly affection for me. It is well! on those terms we can meet and enjoy each other's society."

Hugh's manner made Meta nervous; her pride, too, was touched, and she felt inclined to withdraw her arm, bid him hastily "good-bye," and leave him to his meditations.

"Why should he treat me thus? Surely, gentlemanly feeling and good sense under the peculiar circumstances in which, accidentally, we have been placed, ought to have suggested the propriety of

meeting as old friends—and—and nothing more! *our* past should be forgotten."

Whilst these thoughts were passing through her mind, Hugh had decided he was a vain fool, a heartless fellow, undeserving the kind sympathy of Meta Raycliffe.

"Meta, can you forgive me? I have been so selfishly absorbed in my own grief, I fear I have wounded your kind heart. Forgive me! Oh! you do not, and can never know how much I long for sweet womanly companionship; and now Marian is gone, I have only your sisterly regard to cheer me on my way; if you deprive me of that I am desolate indeed!"

He uttered these words with a voice so akin to the gentle loving tone of bygone days that Meta's heart fluttered painfully, and she scarcely dared trust herself to reply—

"As brother and sister we parted at the gates of Abbots Thorpe that last sad day of your stay among us. If I can serve you as a friend I will. My family for generations have perpetuated a fearful and wicked curse upon yours. Hugh, I wish I had the power to blot it out for ever, and repair the evil it has done! Oh! forgive me, Hugh, for I have neither part nor lot in it. I am your friend, and always will be!"

"Forgive you, Meta? Nay, can you pardon me? I do not deserve your friendship—it is too pure, too highminded for me. But, Meta, I do value it, I do appreciate it, and your kind words comfort me more than I can tell you."

"Then so be it—we are friends, Hugh, for ever."

Meta possessed wonderful tact; she knew when to talk, how to talk, and the time to change the subject before mischief was done. Now was the time to divert Hugh's mind from its absorbing sorrow and restore it to its usual healthy tone and vigour.

"Do you know, Hugh, it is more than four years since you and I parted at the gate of Abbots Thorpe. Then you vowed eternal friendship and a brother's interest in my welfare, and yet to-day we have met almost as strangers—not one word have you asked me concerning my farm or any one thing belonging to me."

"No, I am ashamed to say I have not, but——"

"But will you breakfast with me instead of at the inn? and Matthew Fielding—you remember Matthew—will show you all the wonders we have achieved."

Meta well knew Hugh's eminently practical mind, and that to bring it to the facts and realities of life was the best way to restore it to its natural force and vigour. Her tact was rewarded. Gradually as they walked along she led him to speak of the occurrences of the past four years, which he did with perfect candour, and a renewal of his old confidential way. Meta avoided Abbots Thorpe and Holmlee, taking the nearest cut through the fields to the uplands; she feared a sight of them might excite painful feelings.

At length they reached Meta's farm. It stood on the slope of a hill, and commanded a fine view.

The appearance of Ashlee amazed Hugh, and he expressed it very visibly in his countenance.

"Why, Meta, you have a model farm! What hay-stacks! What order! What splendid out-buildings! This is surely the magic work of good sense and perseverance——"

"And not sitting down in poverty with folded hands and a rueful visage," added Meta. "But do not give me credit for all this; Matthew Fielding has done it all; he is the very best practical farmer in all England; and then, too, my kind friend, Lord Lilsdale, has so wonderfully assisted me."

At that name a thrill of pain passed through Hugh's veins.

"And now, Hugh," said Meta, some time afterwards, "tell me, what do you think of my farm, and how much do you think I have saved for dear old Holmlee? Do you know, I have already purchased three fields which once belonged to Holmlee. What do you think of that? I have walked an inch taller ever since," said she, with a touch of her old playfulness.

Hugh smiled, the first smile since Marian's death.

"I think, Meta, you have achieved wonders, and that some day I shall have the pleasure of seeing you mistress of Holmlee."

Meta's eyes sparkled at the thought, but she said, "No, never, Hugh; it is not for myself I wish to possess it, but for Reginald's boy."

"Why not for Reginald himself?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, that could not be! He is too proud; besides, he has taken the priesthood upon him, and must continue his vocation elsewhere."

"Is he still bent upon missionary work abroad, Meta?"

"I believe so; but that is too painful a subject to be lightly touched upon. Poor Ellinor! I pity her from my heart; she is the most exemplary woman I ever knew."

"That she is!" replied Hugh, heartily. "I rarely see your brother. He is so cold. I suppose he dislikes me. He remembers I am an Ethelstone, and the old, strange feeling of——"

Hugh would not say the word "enmity," so left Meta to fill up the hiatus as she pleased.

"Do you remember Fénélon's remark, Meta? He says 'it is only imperfection that complains of what is imperfect.' I wish your brother could realise this. He makes his own misery by abusing this poor world of ours, without having the satisfaction of improving its condition, or benefiting the people committed to his charge. His parish is a failure. All his schemes—philanthropic, self-denying schemes—are failures, and his church is nearly empty."

Meta's eyes filled with tears.

"But think, Hugh, of the dreadful parish he has. I hear the people are sunk in wickedness and heathenism."

"True; but Ellerton has worked a marvellous change for good in the adjoining one, which was quite as bad, if not worse than your brother's. All

his institutions flourish, and his church is filled to excess."

"Poor Reginald! I fear he mistakes his path of duty," said Meta.

"Well, there certainly is a difference between making a renunciation of the world and a renunciation of ourselves; and the former I believe to be far easier than the latter. Your brother abjures the world, but I have yet to learn that, in consequence, he has attained to any remarkable excellence of personal character or disposition; his temper, for instance, is more irritable than ever."

"Ah! but that is owing to the painful pecuniary circumstances in which he is placed. How can a clergyman attend to the spiritual wants of his people, and have a heart and mind intent only upon holy things, when debts, difficulties, and parochial demands press upon his slender purse? The world requires the clergy to be perfect in holiness, orators, gentlemen, given to charity, and at the beck and call of their parishioners, all for what?—two hundred a year!"

"That is certainly true, Meta; and another evil is, that the common people invariably imagine the clergy to be rich."

"I may be wrong, nay, even wicked, but I cannot help thinking, Hugh, that Reginald's work does not prosper in his parish because he did not renunciate 'self,' and do the work which God's providence seemed specially to open before him; everything seemed adverse to his going into the ministry, while as a layman duties lay upon every side."

For a few moments they were silent; painful thoughts crowded upon their minds.

"May I ask a question, Hugh? Are you—" she hesitated—"are you taking any steps to regain Abbots Thorpe and to punish Mr. Trapps? There is a very wide-spread feeling against him, especially since that ghost affair at Abbots Thorpe."

"The ghost affair! What do you mean?"

Meta at once explained the whole occurrences of that memorable evening when the old squire's ghost had suddenly appeared to the astonished guests, and the horror of Mr. Trapps, who, in his fright, had all but confessed his guilt.

"He said, Hugh, that '*it*' was not destroyed. That '*it*' certainly meant the 'Will.' It is currently reported here that he has not destroyed the Will, but holds the fact of its existence as a 'rod *in terrorem*' over the Glenmores. Oh! if one half be true which is said, Harcourt Glenmore and his mother are infamous!"

"That they are, and I have certain proof of it. The day of retribution will soon dawn upon them, Meta."

"I pity poor Mrs. Harcourt from my heart. She is fearfully kept under by Mrs. Glenmore, and neglected by her husband. It is a fact she never possesses money, although she brought her husband an immense fortune."

"But where is it now, Meta? By dint of gambling, and other expensive sins, Harcourt has managed to squander the best part of it, and also to mortgage timber on the Abbots Thorpe estate.

He is fearfully involved, though what he does with all the money is a mystery which soon will be solved."

"Mr. Trapps, Hugh, is supposed to be very rich."

"And so he is. I well know that from my short connection with the firm of Jones, Twigg, and Son," replied Hugh. "The Glenmores have secrets, and Mr. Trapps is paid well for keeping them, Meta. I have proofs against the Glenmores and against Mr. Trapps; everything is in train, and ruin must eventually fall upon them."

"I suppose you know the post-office woman and her daughter are mixed up in Mr. Trapps's affairs? Letters have been suppressed, and money lost, instigated, it is hinted, by that wretched man, who is engaged to marry the daughter."

Meta would not enter farther upon that subject, as she felt it a delicate point between herself and Hugh. He, however, at once disposed of the difficulty by saying, "Yes, Meta, that also has been thought of. My letters to you and to others were not delivered; I learnt the fact from Thomas Rymer, and it shall not go unpunished," he added, with an Ethelstone gleam flashing angrily in his eye.

The strange enmity of Mr. Trapps, the position and prospects of the Glenmore family, were discussed, until Hugh suddenly discovered he had only time to lay an information at the police-court respecting the post-mistress, pay his bill at the inn, and post to Leeds in time for the last train to London.

A hasty adieu, and a promise to write, was given

when they parted. Meta watched Hugh's retreating figure with an aching heart as he wound round the hill to the valley beneath. At last he disappeared, and then she wept bitterly in very loneliness of spirit.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Hugh returned to his melancholy home with an aching heart. Miles Gorton anxiously awaited his appearance, deeply dejected, and already looking ten years older than on the day of Marian's death.

They sat in Hugh's study, and talked with full hearts and overflowing eyes of Marian, now lying in her grave at Abbots Thorpe. Once be able to expatiate upon our grief, and the comforting balm of hope and resignation is invited to return to the troubled spirit. Silent grief is hopeless; tearless grief often mortal. Gradually they were able to discuss the future with calmness. Hugh recounted all that had occurred at Abbots Thorpe, and his singular meeting with Meta Raycliffe at the grave of his wife. He withheld nothing, and spoke in glowing terms of her wonderful perseverance, energy, and loveliness of disposition. Miles Gorton echoed all he said in Meta's praise, for Ellinor Raycliffe had already taught him to love her.

"And only think of her carrying flowers at that early hour to adorn our Marian's grave! I feel happier now, since you told me this, Hugh; I feel as though she were not so lonely in her distant grave."

"They were sisters in purity of heart and feeling," replied Hugh, with swimming eyes. "Would that Marian had known Meta as a friend!" Hugh sighed deeply; but not for worlds would he breathe a word concerning those dreadful letters, and the fearful consequences they produced. It was enough for him to have his heart rent by the recollection of them, and enough for him to struggle against the demon of revenge which raged within his breast, and might, unless he subdued it, lead him to some fearful deed. Hugh shuddered at the dark feelings which whelmed upon him when he thought of that miscreant, Trapps, and the evil he had brought upon him.

"It must be conquered, God helping me, or I might—I might——" Hugh did not dare to say the words, although they seemed written upon his brain in characters of fire. Weeks passed, and Hugh, as well as Mr. Gorton, tried to divert their painful thoughts by discussing their plans and chances of success in the recovery of Hugh's lost inheritance. All that Meta had told him respecting the ghost scene, the suppression of letters, and the general suspicion of Mr. Trapps, was carefully considered, and finally committed to writing, for the benefit of the lawyers, who were busily investigating Hugh's affairs, and winding their subtle toils around the Glenmores and Mr. Trapps. Hugh's short connection with the office of Jones, Twigg, and Son had brought much painful matter to light, and had also proved the fact of property to a large amount having been conveyed to Trapps by Harcourt Glen-

more. Since then, Hugh's lawyers had discovered that Mr. Trapps had disposed of his land and houses, and was anxiously endeavouring to turn everything he possessed into ready money. This looked suspicious, and was suggestive of an intended trip across the Atlantic to the land of freedom beyond.

We must, however, leave our hero for a time, and revert to Gertrude Glenmore; we must revert also to the day when Hugh saw her in Hyde Park, in confidential conversation with Theodore Ellerton.

Theodore Ellerton had known Gertrude from a child, and Mrs. Glenmore had permitted, nay, encouraged the intimacy, because she considered it *safe*. Besides, it looked well to the world that a clergyman of such undoubted piety and increasing influence should be upon intimate terms with the family, so Mrs. Glenmore "piously" invited Mr. Ellerton's clerical supervision over the spiritual interests of her late husband's ward.

"The charge, Mr. Ellerton, is too onerous for me; may I count upon your valuable aid in subduing her rebellious spirit! It is positively awful," continued Mrs. Glenmore behind her fan, with a slight shudder of her fair round shoulders; "no one knows the fearful disposition of that girl except myself."

Notwithstanding the irresistible fascination of Mrs. Glenmore's "*good* look," and the varying tones of her rich soft voice, as she fixed her melting blue eyes upon his, Mr. Ellerton had little faith in her piety, and less in the sincerity of her general character. He was scarcely the man to be deceived by the wiles of a finished actress and an artful woman, for Mr.

Ellerton's education had not been a mere daily routine of classical lore, but the analysis of human life and character. He had not lost his individuality in the priesthood, drowning his mentality in the deep, dark waters of controversial theology, or picking his brains fibre from fibre, until they fitted into the current ready-made pattern of the "very best Anglican!" No such burthen had he bound upon his conscience; he was simply God's messenger to men's souls, and a priest of the English branch of the Church Catholic, bound by her rules, which without controversy he had sworn to maintain.

Mr. Ellerton read Mrs. Glenmore like a book, and as she looked with such sweet urbanity into his face, his mental reservation was that Mrs. Glenmore was a bright specimen of the snake genus, always looking loveliest when most bent upon mischief. He had penetration to read the hidden mysteries of sin in her soft beautiful face, even as she sat in complacent luxury and "feather-bed" piety upon her rich crimson couch, with the folds of her velvet dress setting off the Juno charms of her lovely person to the best advantage.

"She is perfection in person, tact, and conversation," cogitated Mr. Ellerton, "but dangerous as a panther. Hers is a vicious organisation, and education has but strengthened the arts by which she wiles. Gertrude Elliott, poor defenceless girl, shall be rescued from the toils of that woman, or I am not Ellerton."

Mrs. Glenmore was as acute as himself, and read the dangerous determination in his eye before he spoke.

"Ha! ha! he shows the 'cloven' already, does he? It won't do, Mr. Ellerton; you are no match for me," thought Mrs. Glenmore beneath her sweetest smile. Mr. Ellerton, however, had accepted the trust, and Mrs. Glenmore could not then retract. Gertrude attended his church upon week days, for during the long visits of Ellinor to Lady Fulton she had learnt to delight in the daily services. Possibly Gertrude did not attend them from the highest motive, but as a relief from the monotony of the school-room, and the cold heartlessness of a house given up to gaiety and dissipation. There, after service, Mr. Ellerton smiled upon her and gave her sweet counsel; old men and women, too, looked kindly upon the lovely girl taking to good ways so early, and she basked in the honest sincerity of their genial smiles, because she yearned for home, loving faces, and a mother's tender care.

Gertrude's week-day church-going was unknown to Mrs. Glenmore, who upon Sundays attended a fashionable church, where the clergyman ministered to his congregation upon the strictest principles of Low Church orthodoxy—lawn cuffs, unexceptionable pocket handkerchief, black gown with large inflated sleeves, and a Bible interleaved with a so-termed extemporary sermon. Gertrude's maid was a religious woman, and willingly attended her mistress to Mr. Ellerton's church. Gertrude well knew Mrs. Glenmore would not sanction this daily church-going. But stolen fruit is proverbially the sweetest, and Gertrude had no difficulty in deceiving Mrs. Glenmore upon this point, as she never left her room until after Gertrude's return from church. It was Gertrude's

one little bit of independence, and she enjoyed it thoroughly.

From the moment Mrs. Glenmore had discovered Mr. Ellerton's determination to befriend Gertrude, she had gradually cooled towards him, and had given "not at home" orders when he called. For Gertrude's sake he endured these slights, and remained uninfluenced by them. Perhaps he looked upon her sweet face, now budding into womanhood, and dreamed for a brief span a little romance concerning it, in which he formed the prominent character. If so, it was quickly dispelled, for Gertrude scarcely realised the perfection of character which he desired in a wife. "No; a bachelor's life is best," he said to himself as the last dim outlines of his romantic picture of domestic bliss were finally banished from his mind by the announcement of Gertrude's marriage with Harcourt Glenmore. It must be confessed that she sank considerably in his estimation after that fact became known to him, for he could not understand how Gertrude Elliott could love the handsome but frivolous Harcourt Glenmore. True, Theodore was thirty, and Gertrude only seventeen;—true, he was only a poor clergyman, and she must, had she married him, have given up fashion and frivolity; but—but Theodore Ellerton would have respected woman's nature more had Gertrude Elliott refused an empty-headed coxcomb, and waited for—himself. However, it was not to be; Gertrude married Harcourt Glenmore, and became a neglected, miserable wife, drowning her finer, better nature in the intoxicating adulation of the fashionable world.

Theodore Ellerton could never lose interest in one who, for a brief span, had been the inspiration of a delightful dream. He had reasoned himself into a confirmed bachelor. "Gregory the Seventh was a wise man," he said; "priests are best unmarried! I shall never marry, never! Instead of a Griselda I might find a Xantippe, and then, who knows to what the contentions of a scolding wife might bring me—the coldness of Socrates or the temper of a fiend! '*Noli me tangere,*' matrimony," he added, as he littered his room to his heart's content, exchanged boots for slippers, a coat for a dressing-gown, and prepared to read Plato. So ended Theodore Ellerton's dream of domestic bliss.

Some time afterwards, he was called in to visit a dying woman in his parish. That woman had once been lady's maid to Gertrude's mother. Now she was dying, and had a conscience ill at ease; confession, reparation, had become a necessity to her weary soul. In her extremity she sent for the clergyman of the parish in which she was located, and that clergyman, by a singular coincidence, was Mr. Ellerton. To him she gradually unburthened her conscience, revealing a story of wrong, injustice, and cruelty which made Ellerton shudder, and haunted him for many a day. Some time after that, Mrs. Moore rallied a little, and removed to Reginald Raycliffe's parish. Our readers will remember Mr. Ellerton asked Reginald's permission to visit her, and his confusion when Ellinor offered her services in Mrs. Moore's behalf. The whole sad history flashed upon his mind, and the cruel part which Ellinor's parents had acted in

it. He did not know how to reply, hence his confusion and hasty departure.

Again Mrs. Moore was taken extremely ill, and could not rest day or night. She must see the child of her maligned and much-injured mistress. Her mental sufferings were fearful; God's pardon could not rest upon her soul until she had unburthened her conscience, and obtained forgiveness from the child whose mother she had conspired to ruin and kill.

She implored Mr. Ellerton to see Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore, and to persuade her to visit the wretched being who had been the cause of so much misery. After much hesitation, he at last consented to do so.

"But how was he to gain an interview?" Since Gertrude's marriage the intimacy had gradually died away, and he felt he could not, without great sacrifice of feeling, call at the Glenmores. He neither wished to encounter Mrs. Glenmore's repelling dignity, nor Harcourt's free and easy familiarity. Knowing, too, all he did concerning certain private affairs connected with the past history of the family, no wonder he shrank from a renewal of their acquaintance. A sight of Mrs. Glenmore's Juno form when she glided past him in any public assembly, wearing her soft, heartless smile, invariably sent a shudder through his frame as he bowed low to avoid meeting her cold blue eye. At length accident favoured Ellerton's wishes. It was that day in Hyde Park, when observing Gertrude seated beneath some trees, he seized the opportunity of speaking to her, and abruptly quitted Hugh and Marian in order to do so. Neither Mrs. Glenmore

nor Harcourt were near, and the chance was too good to be lost.

Gertrude was delighted to meet her old friend, and greeted him warmly. "It is ages since we met; but I shall never forget those happy days when I went to your church, Mr. Ellerton."

"I hope you continue the good practice, Mrs. Harcourt; a prayerless fashionable life is a fearful thing!" said Theodore, with a slight tremour in his voice.

"It is, it is, Mr. Ellerton; I have discovered that. Oh! it is a feverish dream, which leads to—what?"

"To forgetfulness of God," replied Ellerton solemnly, "and after its hurried gallop is over, only ends in an absorbing desire to finish life where we began, and bridge over the past with a dulled conscience or a drowned memory. Oh! believe me, no such existence can bring peace at last; it is only a pure life of week-day duty fulfilled conscientiously, and with the fear of God before our eyes, which, in old age, or when afflictions come, crowns our days with a holy sabbath."

Tears started into Gertrude's eyes; but to cry in Hyde Park would scarcely be seemly, so she chased them away, and, as many do, hid her better feelings beneath the mask of badinage.

"I have sought this interview some time," he remarked seriously; "may I have a little private conversation with you? We had better seek a more retired path than this, for what I have to say is of import, and would scarcely do to be overheard."

Again Gertrude tried to avoid a serious turn to the

conversation. She dreaded a sermon, and Mr. Ellerton looked full of solemnity.

With a forced laugh Gertrude replied, "that for Mr. Ellerton's sake she would submit to a sermon if he promised the infliction should be brief."

"It is no sermon, Mrs. Harcourt," replied Ellerton, coldly, "but an affair which nearly concerns you and other members of your family."

Gertrude flushed painfully, and then turned deadly pale.

"Is it—is it anything concerning my parents?"

"It is."

Gertrude pressed her hand to her heart, and leaned against a tree for support. Mr. Ellerton thought she would faint.

"Do not distress yourself, dear Mrs. Harcourt," he said, with a touch of his old tenderness, "you have nothing to fear, but everything to hope. You may now learn your parents' history from one who knows it well, and you may have the happiness of removing a stigma from the memory of your mother; it is right that guilt should be punished and innocence vindicated."

"Do not fear for me, Mr. Ellerton. I am strong now—the sudden faintness has passed away. Tell me all; I can bear it now."

"No, Mrs. Harcourt, it is not for me to tell you that sad history. Accidentally I became acquainted with a Mrs. Moore; she was very ill, and had a smitten conscience. No rest, no peace can fall upon her benighted soul until she has seen you, confessed her guilt, and received your forgiveness for

injuries done to your mother. Her own words are, that 'she must do an act of justice before she dies.' In order to do this, she dreads the fact of her arrival in London being made known to Mrs. Glenmore, lest her purpose should be defeated."

"I will not name it, Mr. Ellerton; but suppose I cannot forgive her? Had she injured me I might, but my mother! I feel as though I never could. Mystery and misery have attended my steps ever since I was born," added Gertrude, passionately. "I am different to every other being in the world: that ragged boy there has parents, I have none; their very names are a myth to me, and I am thrown defenceless and alone upon the mercy of those who care not whether I live or die, so that my money is theirs. I am a beggar, living upon the bounty of Mrs. Glenmore! It must not, it shall not be! She shall no longer dole out her pounds to me, who ought to have thousands at my command. I must, I will know all, at whatever cost to myself or others!"

"These subjects, Mrs. Harcourt, are family matters, upon which I must decline to enter. You are a wife, and obedience to your husband, remember, is a first duty; but with Mrs. Glenmore the case is different, and I strongly advise you to assert your position, and insist upon her 'non-interference' in domestic and monetary affairs."

"Assert my position! Insist!" reiterated Gertrude with a laugh, so ringing with bitterness that it startled and pained Mr. Ellerton.

"Can you not persuade your husband to form another establishment for his mother? Try to per-

suade him; a man is always open to conviction, and a meek, gentle spirit in a wife is sure to conquer at last. I never knew an instance of a bad husband being reclaimed by a defiant, overbearing woman."

Gertrude curled her lip haughtily, and shrugged her graceful shoulders with an impatient gesture.

"Hitherto I have counted upon Mr. Ellerton's friendship, and believed that by him at least Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore was judged justly; it is a mistake, a fallacy; but what is there in life which is not a mistake? ourselves, the world, and everything in it is a mistake!"

"Except God and nature," added Mr. Ellerton, solemnly. "We make the world a mistake because we abuse it, and we make ourselves a mistake because we forget we are temples of divinity. But do not misunderstand me, dear Mrs. Harcourt, for I am indeed your friend, whatever you may think to the contrary in the wayward bitterness of your present feelings. Ere long you will know I am too much your friend to allow feelings, which, owing to peculiar circumstances, are morbidly exaggerated, to lead you out of the path of duty and obedience to one whom, at God's altar, whatever his faults may be, you have sworn to love, honour, and obey."

This was hard doctrine to Gertrude. She respected Mr. Ellerton all the more for uttering it, but deigned no reply. They were silent for a few seconds; Mr. Ellerton was the first to speak.

"My mission, Mrs. Harcourt, is now ended, and I merely wait to hear your determination. Will you see Mrs. Moore, and when?"

"I will! and pray Heaven I may be able to forgive her if she has injured my mother! Ruin, disgrace, and misery seem lying at my husband's door, and I am the innocent cause of it all. What is this but destiny? The demon of revenge stands in my path beckoning me on—on—I scarcely know how or where, and every step I take seems to bring destruction nearer those with whom my lot in life is cast. Oh! Mr. Ellerton, tell me, do natures change? is it possible to grow out of one into another until not one jot or tittle of the old 'self' is left behind? Alas! I am no longer what I was, but bitter, unforgiving, and with a sense of wrong upon me which makes me more a fiend than a woman! It is not against my husband I feel this, but Mrs. Glenmore, and Mr. Trapps, her tyrant and slave combined. Harcourt would have been good and true. Oh! *she* has ruined him; but I shall yet live to see him a better creature, a happier man. Then all, all shall be his, and you shall never again have occasion to remind me of my duty as a loving and obedient wife."

"Calm yourself, dear Mrs. Harcourt; we shall be observed; already curious eyes are upon us."

"Then adieu, Mr. Ellerton; I will meet you at your church after prayers on Wednesday next, and accompany you to Mrs. Moore's. In the meantime forgive and forget the hasty temper I have exhibited."

"That I will; but promise me to calm your feelings as much as possible before Wednesday; you will require courage, forbearance, and the spirit of

forgiveness to carry you through the interview. Adieu! God bless and preserve you."

As Mr. Ellerton turned to leave Gertrude, he observed a little man with a long unprepossessing face, and smoothly plastered hair, intently watching them from behind the shelter of a large tree. The next instant Mr. Trapps raised his hat, and bowed with servile respect to Mr. Ellerton, who had scarcely passed before a wicked leer twinkled in his eye, and crossed his lips with its baneful expression.

"Ha! ha! life is a queer thing too!" he muttered to himself. "I'll bring that proud, beautiful Mrs. Harcourt to her senses yet! She hates me, knows I'm bad, and is bent upon upsetting all my plans. I believe the shrew knows something, and suspects more, concerning things in general, and myself in particular, than is quite agreeable to me or good for her. But, hurrah for the man who can wear two faces under one hat! John Trapps need not fear if things do look shady. That fool, Harcourt Glenmore, is in my power; I can screw a few odd thousands out of him yet before I finish this business, pocket my riches, and make off for America *without* my dear Miss Banks. Ha! ha! what a 'sell' for her! I have played my cards well. Hold up your head, John Trapps, for there is not a cleverer fellow than you in Hyde Park this day! Vengeance is in my hand; ruin is upon Abbots Thorpe, and it will soon be mortgaged up to the topmost branches of its accursed trees. Hugh Atheling Ethelstone shall never return to his

inheritance; John Trapps knows that! A few more thousands squeezed out of that nincompoop, and then the Will goes into the fire, and the business ends with John Trapps retiring upon his fortune, a religious married man, given over to benefit his species! The "pious" dodge saves many a man his neck, and is safe—comfortable too!"

Mr. Trapps walked leisurely on towards the park gates. He took out-of-the-way paths, as if he feared the gay throngs he met would read his thoughts, and deliver him over to justice. Guilt makes an unreasoning coward! Many a villain might pass scatheless through the world were it not for the "conscience-Nemesis" following upon his heels! The busy crowd care not for you, Mr. Trapps. Keep your own counsels, and you will pass by with your venom upon your tongue, like the viper, which is no less deadly because unobserved!

At the park gates he encountered Hugh's carriage, and had to step on one side until it passed through the entrance. The sight of his happiness, seated with a lovely wife at his side, was as poison to his diseased mind. He ground his teeth, and nursed his hatred until it attained a height which made it almost lunacy. Then he fell into a musing, shuddering fit; his cheek blanched, and he returned home with all the swagger dropped out of his brisk, well-preserved little body.

After all, he thought, "murder will out!" Surely they were laying a trap for him? Why deceive himself? He had yet time to escape, and evade the law. "That Jezebel, Mrs. Harcourt, is at the

bottom of all this! Yes, yes!" he continued, "I must strike now; the iron is hot to-day, but who knows how cold it may be a month hence?" Should he at once destroy the Will, and make off with what he had? No, no; absurd to think of such a thing! His plans were not ripe, and if he were out of the way, ten to one but that fool, Harcourt Glenmore, would at once make a clean breast, and confess all. "To remain where I am for the present is my duty. I have them fast. They are in John Trapps's power, tight as the clutch of death! Ay, ay, Mrs. Glenmore, your secrets are mine, and to leave England now would be madness. Patience and courage, John Trapps! But, after all, I hate the thought of returning next week to that accursed Abbots Thorpe. What if the old squire's ghost should come again, catch at my sleeve, and hold me fast, as it did on that night—here—here on my arm? I shall never rub off the impression of that ice-cold hand; it will be here to all eternity!"

Swiftly every circumstance of that night when he stole the squire's Will whelmed upon his mind; the very squares upon the carpet rose up in judgment against him, whilst every object in that dreaded room seemed fraught with evil to himself, and impressed themselves upon his brain with painful distinctness. The figure of the squire, his rigid form, the upturned feet, the pale, marble face, lying so solemnly within the dark, stately bed! And that horrid catch upon his sleeve, which filled his soul with terror, and made him a poor, miserable coward, with tottering knees and a craven spirit, but with a

heart as steeped in wickedness and as ready to sin again as ever! He was enjoying his revenge; it flavoured his palate pleasantly; but Conscience was upon him, whilst the demon who had made him his own still urged him on, to fill up the full measure of his iniquity.

Trapps returned to Belgrave Square before his master. He went direct to Harcourt's dressing-room, and busied himself in arranging the wardrobe. Harcourt at length returned, and hurriedly dressed for dinner.

"Will Mrs. Harcourt be at home to dinner, Trapps?" he asked.

"I think not, sir. Mrs. Glenmore is in her dressing-room, but Mrs. Harcourt is taking a walk with Mr. Ellerton, in order to make some arrangement about an appointment she has with him—only prayers, sir, or something of that sort."

"An appointment with Mr. Ellerton! What do you mean, sirrah? Your impudence exceeds the bounds of my patience. My wife, Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore, make an appointment with any man! How dare you utter the libel?"

"I only say what I heard and saw, sir," answered Trapps, coolly, as he put the last finishing touch to his master's toilet, and then drew back to survey his handiwork with a complacent smile. "Mr. Ellerton was talking to my mistress under the trees in Hyde Park whilst you were riding with Miss Cecilia. I saw them, and I heard them make some engagement for—some time, I don't know when—and I saw——" Trapps hesitated.

"Well, old imp of Satan! what did you see? Be quick, or by heavens it will be worse for you!"

"Well, I saw Mrs. Harcourt in tears, and I heard her say you were a cruel man, and—and Mr. Ellerton supported her because she was going to faint; and then they arranged something, I don't know what, about an interview."

"Trapps, you know too well I do not love my wife, and that I married for money—nay, that I love another; but by heavens, let any man dare to utter one word against her virtue, her purity and innocence, and—and I'll smash his bones to powder or blow his brains out of his lying pate! Mark me, Trapps," said Harcourt, seizing him by the nape of his coat collar, and swinging him violently round, to hold him at arm's length in an iron grasp, "I am becoming desperate. I am undone, ruined, disgraced—a felon, because I am living upon what I know ought to be Hugh Atheling Ethelstone's! You—you have made me what I am. Years ago I should have given up Abbots Thorpe to its rightful heir; but you, vile wretch that you are, threatened, if I did so, to reveal secrets—secrets connected with my family, in which the fair fame of my mother is concerned. In this way you have defrauded me of thousands; led me on to gambling, the turf, and every iniquity of which I could be guilty. Now, now you meet your reward! I am desperate! I care not what you say about me or my mother; but contaminate my innocent wife, sirrah, by breathing her name, and I'll put my heel upon your accursed heart till it is ground to powder!" Harcourt glared

so furiously upon Trapps, his craven spirit quailed within him, and he sank upon his knees in an agony of terror. "Begone! out of my sight, miscreant, lest I add bloodguiltiness to the sins of the Glenmores!"

Harcourt pulled Trapps up by his coat collar, and kicking him from him, hurled him headlong through the door, shutting it upon his quaking form with a bang which rattled every window in the house. Trapps lay upon the floor, too exhausted to rise, muttering curses and vowing vengeance, as, in dumb show, he shook his clenched fist defiantly at the door.

The following Wednesday came. Gertrude made an excuse, and said she was going to spend the day with her friend, Lady Emily de Vere. Thither she drove, and at the door dismissed her carriage with a command to return for her at five o'clock.

Lady Emily had not yet left her room, but sent a message desiring to see Gertrude there. They chatted pleasantly for half an hour, and made their arrangements, when Gertrude explained that she wished to have a cab sent for, as she had a strong desire to attend prayers at Mr. Ellerton's church.

"The fact is, Emily, that Mrs. Glenmore and my husband object so much to daily prayers, 'upon principle' I suppose, that I wish to go there unknown to them, in order to avoid an opposition storm. So do help me? I shall return here to meet my carriage."

Gertrude blushed deeply whilst she uttered these words, because she felt their untruthfulness.

"Heigho! I wish I could attend more diligently to my religious duties, Gertrude. But there seems no time for anything except——"

"Except fashion and frivolity," said Gertrude. "Oh, I know you, like myself, are heartily tired of it, and long for something better! and that something better is religion. I am convinced of it; and you are too, Emily."

"Well, I am not happy, or perfectly satisfied with myself or the world generally; but to devote oneself entirely to religion seems to me, just at present, as perilous a leap as that of Curtius into the gulf—a sort of mental suicide which makes one shudder!"

"Oh, do not say so! You will think differently yet, my dear friend; but I must leave you; the cab is here, and my time going fast."

"By your experience I shall hope to profit, Gertrude. We meet at the Freemantles' this evening, so only *au revoir!*"

Before that day month Lady Emily de Vere was carried to her grave, to experience the life which is to come!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THEODORE ELLERTON visited the Raycliffes at an early hour the day he had arranged to meet Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore at his church, in order to take her thence to the lodgings of Mrs. Moore. He felt nervous and anxious, consequently action became a necessity; he must do something to relieve the feeling. Blest be the man who invented exercise, and blest is he who can avail himself of it! Every mental ailment is certain to find relief, if not cure, by the simple anodynes of air and exercise! He had heard, too, of Reginald's appointment as missionary chaplain to a newly-made colonial bishop, and he wished to assure himself of the truth of the report.

"And so, my dear fellow," said Ellerton, after their salutations were over, "and so you are really leaving this native missionary station of yours for another, and I think less urgent, position abroad. Well, I am sorry for it; this parish of yours still claims your fostering care. The seeds you have sown have scarcely yet had time to take root, much less bear fruit."

"My good fellow, were I to remain here twelve

months longer, I should die, or worse still, lose health as well as self-respect. I am over head and ears in debt; church schools, lending libraries, soup kitchens, and greedy poor folk, who imagine the parsonage a perfect El Dorado, keep me in perpetual hot water, without either time or energy to do my duty spiritually as a clergyman. In fact, Ellerton, I have no heart for my clerical duties. I am cowed and quieted, nay, I cannot look my neighbour in the face, because I preach what I cannot practise, namely, to owe no man anything. Every year subscriptions fall away; there is not a soul in this wretched district with either means or inclination to assist; every good work commenced is like spilled water; in short, I verily believe the spirit of charity has taken to itself wings, and flown away to some fairer scene."

"Where her services are not required," suggested Mr. Ellerton. "My good fellow," he continued, "from my heart I pity you; but you came without counting the cost to a poor *unendowed* church, in a wretched parish where every second man is a pauper, and behold the inevitable result!"

"The sneers and contempt of my friends," replied Reginald coolly. "Your advice, Ellerton, comes when, as Young says, 'Man suspects himself a fool,' and that is my case."

"Just so," replied Ellerton, regardless of Reginald's remark. "Worldly men, my dear fellow, laugh, wicked men scoff, and conventional piety turns up the whites of her eyes, because you are overwhelmed with debt. The thoughtless zeal of fashionable philanthropy has made you, to a certain

extent, dishonest, and consequently, to a mind like yours, miserable. The expenses of church schools, and other parochial machinery, built and set in motion by some thoughtless Christian (belauded to the skies probably for the deed), has gone far to kill you, and now finishes the business by leaving no alternative except a life of humiliation, or expatriation to the land of the heathen. A man's charity in the way of building churches and schools in poor, populous districts, is worthless, unless he endow them with sufficient income for their support. It is not charity, but ostentation; and I have neither thanks nor respect to give to the individuals who are guilty of such cruel acts of fashionable piety."

"I quite agree with you, Ellerton. My church, and those splendid schools, were built by a retired wealthy brewer, whose munificence was paraded in every paper far and near, whilst others were invited to 'go and do likewise.' They were opened with great ceremony, a duke being invited to grace it with his presence; fashion 'rolled the maddening crowd's ignoble strife' to our church doors, and we had a splendid sermon from the bishop, imploring the people to give liberally, and the result was a collection of two hundred pounds, which was devoted to the purchase of communion plate and other church furniture. The crowds departed, extolling my munificent patron, who from that day to this has never set foot in the parish, gives two guineas a year to the support of his charity, and thinks he has done all that Christian philanthropy demands. Had it not been for my kind, good friend, Miles Gorton,

this church and these schools must have been shut up long ago."

Ellerton looked in surprise at Reginald's face, which wore a severely sarcastic look foreign to its usually calm, melancholy expression. In fact Reginald was greatly changed. Severe thought had deepened every line, and constant worry and anxiety upon monetary matters had detracted, as it invariably does, from the high and intellectual tone of his countenance. Money, money, money, was now the constant thought, to make both ends meet, which all say is so easy, but in practice find so difficult. When a small clerical income grows no larger; when family expenses expand beyond calculation; when the expecting beggar is ever at the door; when the multitudinous small expenses of a poor church and parish without adequate resources to meet them weigh upon the unfriended parson's brain, — no wonder his spirits, and sermons too, fail; his eyes grow dim, his health gives way, or, worse still, he is gradually driven into being a clerical "black sheep," known and shunned by men.

Can we be surprised that parents, who have seen something of the sufferings of a large portion of the clergy, fear to launch their sons upon such a stormy sea of clerical difficulty, knowing he must be more an angel than a man to withstand the temptations and sorrows incident to such a position. Talk of strikes! I have often longed to see the *poor* clergy make one—only it would not evince that meek and quiet spirit like unto His whose servants they are!

Ellerton noted the change in Reginald with regret. "Poor fellow! he is not the man for such a parish as this. Iron nerves, a cool brain, the power to say 'no' to every demand when the pocket is nearly empty, and the impudence which will enable him to beg for his church and schools from every man he meets, whilst he himself ekes out his starving income by travelling with a green baize bag filled with 'interesting facts,' as 'deputation' to some 'society,' living upon his brethren in every town he visits. Alas! how are the mighty fallen when they come to such a pass as this!"

Ellinor entered the room where they were conversing, holding her boy by the hand. She also was changed; anxiety and grief had done its work, for Reginald's troubles were hers. In three months, too, she must part with her darling boy. They dare not take him, as they feared the effects of climate, so had agreed to leave him with Meta Raycliffe during their five years' probation abroad in the train of the newly-made missionary Bishop of ——.

Ellerton tried hard to dissuade Reginald from what he termed his "mad freak," especially as he noted Ellinor's downcast face when her eyes rested upon her child, and that it required no small effort on her part to maintain her composure whilst they discussed the question.

"My dear Ellerton, don't say another word; my mind is made up. I go because God calls, and I must obey; this time I am certain of the voice. My dear wife is my only anxiety; would that I could persuade her to remain behind with Reggy!

I know my sister Meta would be kind to her, and delighted to have her with her."

"No, dear Reginald, my duty is to you, as well as to our boy; where you are, I am. The climate would not do for Reggy, but five years will soon pass, and then." Ellinor pressed her boy to her side with such a look of motherly anguish on her face that Ellerton had to turn away to hide his tears. He glanced hurriedly from one to another, saw the quivering lip, the large tears gathering heavily in her drooping eyelid, and with an impulse which broke down all constraint and ceremony, exclaimed—

"Raycliffe, neither God nor religion demands this sacrifice on your part! I believe that where God places us we have work to do, and that we are never happy or easy in our minds if we leave it undone. Is not this true? And have not you a heathen parish at home to bring within the fold? and have you not family duties and ties to chain you to England? Oh! believe me, Raycliffe, the duties which are visible as finger-posts along the path of life, sufficiently mark out the intentions of God. To pass them by, and leave them on the road, whilst we seek imaginary ones elsewhere, will bring no blessing, nor will the work prosper, because it is man's self-appointed task and not our Father's. Stay, stay where you are, and do the work which lies at hand; surely, this parish requires missionary energy far more than the heathen land to which you are going, because the condemnation is greater to those within hearing of the gospel than to the people who know not the glad tidings."

Reginald bent his head in silence, as if pondering over the words.

"No, Ellerton, it is too late; I know my course now, and shall follow it. Perhaps once I mistook my path, that is past. But," he added, in a lower tone of deep earnestness, "I still want *evidence* of His presence striving in me, and I want manifestation of approval of the step I am about to take—all, all is dark!" he added, bitterly. "My mistake was *then* in fancying mental power and intellectual religion to be moral regeneration and practical piety. Everything fails! I am disappointed in myself and others, and have lost all confidence in everybody and everything. For mercy's sake, Ellerton, say no more upon this subject, but rather bid me God speed, and in the strength of that blessing let me go!"

Ellinor crossed the room to Reginald, and bent in anxious solicitude over her husband, who now sat with his elbows upon his knees, and his face buried dejectedly in his hands. Her voice was broken with grief as she pressed her lips to his brow, and said, "Oh, Reginald! look up, do not distress yourself, all is for the best, and as to the past, let that be forgotten; surely nothing now remains of it except the blessed fruits of adversity, and the lessons God teaches us by our own errors and the wrong we have suffered!"

The tears gushed through Reginald's fingers, and in order to avoid a scene which she well knew he could not endure, she quietly withdrew. Once alone in her own room, she sank in a long motion-

less agony of prayer for strength to meet the future, and power to lighten her husband's burthen, whose worn spirit seemed to know no rest.

Poor Reginald! For years he had given strength and substance and intellect to God's service. Daily in His temple, denying himself the commonest comforts of life, as a lesson of self-denial, and seeking Him, as he believed, with his whole heart and soul; and yet the light he felt was wanting. Where was it to be found? Why did he not find rest? Why was he ever opening the Book of Life, and yet ever waiting for something he had not and could not receive? Promises, consolations, encouragement, and peace were all written there, and yet he was "weary and heavy laden" with the spirit of heaviness upon him. Marah's waters were indeed bitter, and the living stream which quickened others increased neither his faith nor courage. What lacked he yet? No answer came to this question, because he asked it in intellectual pride rather than in the spirit of deep humility and self-abnegation, which the Infinite requires from him whose Christianity in the full pride and ostentation of sonship is set upon a hill to be seen of men rather than acknowledged with fear and trembling, because so weak a vessel contains so great a jewel.

Ellerton remained some time longer with Reginald, but could not dissuade him from his purpose. Then he ceased to argue the point, but offered his services with so much warmth and tact, that Reginald felt in him he had a friend, and might accept them sincerely.

Ellinor had written to Mrs. Glenmore to implore a parting interview, and she had very coldly acceded to the request. Ellinor longed for a mother's blessing before she left her native land, perhaps for ever. Never could she forget that last parting with her mother! Years afterwards the remembrance of it almost swelled her heart to suffocation. Not one word, one touch, or one look of real tenderness to dwell upon; but only that as a criminal, drooping and silent, she received *her* mother's last adieu. For a moment Ellinor's indignation was aroused, and as their bright glances met, Mrs. Glenmore might have read somewhat of her own haughty spirit in that of her daughter. It was only for an instant; the next, Ellinor blamed herself, and bowed her head upon her mother's knee to hide her tears.

"If not your love, dear mother, at least give me your blessing before we part; it may be for ever!"

"Bless you, my child!" She imprinted another cold kiss upon Ellinor's brow. "Rise, be not so abject; actions, not words, prove sincerity; let the future atone for past disobedience. Adieu! may you be blessed! I shall see your boy occasionally, and shall further his interests with Harcourt as far as possible."

Ellinor left the house with a cold shudder. Mother and daughter never met again in this world!

A few weeks afterwards she and Reginald parted from all they held dear to sail to an unhealthy missionary station with its newly-made bishop. How many ties were rent asunder, how many dear sacrifices made by that sorrowful band of men, as they

lost sight of dear old England to carry their Master's message to the benighted heathen, shall never be known or realised, until assembled nations meet as one family before the great white throne of God!

One heart left behind was stricken even unto death, and this was poor Lady Fulton. She had accompanied them to Liverpool, where they were to embark, with the unselfish determination to support and encourage her beloved niece when the hour of parting with her child should arrive. To the last moment she kept up, and smiled her tearless adieu.

"Meta and I will be more than mother to your boy, Ellinor; so keep up your heart, love—five years will soon pass away, and then, if all be well, we meet again."

The ship glided away like a thing of life, down the noble river, into the expanding sea, with its freight of human bursting hearts, whose secrets and griefs were only known to the Infinite above, who spans the waters as so many drops in the ocean of His Infinity!

Hand in hand, until midnight, Reginald and Ellinor watched the receding land. And as they poured forth their prayers for those they had left behind, one whose last parting kiss of love still warmed their lips had even then passed away from earth to Heaven!

Lady Fulton returned to the hotel with Meta Raycliffe and their little charge, Reginald Raycliffe, to all appearance well, and even cheerful.

Meta did not know her intimately, or might have suspected something wrong in the unnatural

brightness of her eye and the deep serenity of her manner.

Lady Fulton retired to her room and dismissed her maid for an hour. When she returned she found her mistress seated in an old-fashioned easy chair, with her open Bible on a small table before her, and her grey head bowed upon her hands—Lady Fulton was dead!

That day's unselfish effort to appear calm, when her heart was ready to break with anguish, had stretched the delicate thread of life beyond its powers of tension, and Lucy, Lady Fulton, had passed from time into eternity.

CHAPTER XXX.

After prayers Gertrude and Mr. Ellerton proceeded as arranged to Mrs. Moore's.

"I called upon your sister, Mrs. Raycliffe, this morning," said Mr. Ellerton, as they wended their way through the dirty streets, crowded with the "Bohemians" of society, whose wild looks and jeering laughter sent a thrill of horror through Gertrude's frame.

"Did you? How I long to see her—dear Ellinor! I am forbidden to see her or even speak to her if we met. But this shall not go on much longer! Mrs. Glenmore's quiet insolence maddens me, and when I think of it I am ready to do some desperate act."

"Calm yourself, Mrs. Harcourt; be gentle and wise, and try to gain more influence over your husband."

"Oh, if I could!" she exclaimed, despairingly.

"Ask help from a higher source, dear Mrs. Harcourt; by prayer and faith in the promises you will gain strength and a blessing."

"Oh! if I could pray from my heart; but I cannot. God hides His face from me, and I feel no

pleasure in religion, no pleasure in the world, and no pleasure in anything. Excitement seems my only refuge from myself and misery."

"God does not always answer a first or second prayer; but persevere and you will be helped at last. Give up fashion, frivolity, and that dreary living on upon excitement; make room for religion, give it a place in your heart, and you will find He never hides His face from those who seek Him in *earnest*."

"Mr. Ellerton, it is of no use. I fear my heart is very hard. I feel no real interest in religion; I nourish the viper of revenge, hatred, and all uncharitableness against Mrs. Glenmore. I cannot help it; I hate her; she has been a black blot upon my life ever since I was born." Gertrude wept beneath her veil.

"Cast these wicked thoughts from you, Mrs. Harcourt, and believe that these trials of yours are teaching you lessons of humility and submission, gentleness and patience. Persevere in an upward path, then every step will be easier, the thorns and briars fewer, as you wend onwards to your eternal home. But calm yourself, for we are at Mrs. Moore's door."

"Oh! wait a moment. I cannot, I dare not enter! What horrid secret has she to unfold?"

"Poor child! So young, so beautiful, so helpless!" Ellerton thought with a sigh, as he looked at her wan face.

"This is weak, and very foolish, Mr. Ellerton. Take me to her; let me know the worst; anything rather than this horrid suspense. But what can this

dreadful secret be? My very heart quails at the thought of it!"

Submitting to his guidance like a child, she suffered him to lead her up the creaking staircase to a room adjoining Mrs. Moore's.

"Wait in that back parlour for a moment, dear Mrs. Harcourt, whilst I prepare her for your presence."

Gertrude looked round the dark poverty-stricken room with a shudder. Upon a rickety table beneath the window lay a handsome Bible, which Gertrude opened. On the title-page was written in a beautiful Italian hand, "Margaret Graham, from a sincere friend." Beneath were the initials and date, "G. M. E., June 12th, '18—." Gertrude felt convinced it was her mother's writing from its similarity to some she possessed, and kissed the initials with intense emotion. She hastily wiped away her tears, and turned to meet Mr. Ellerton, who at that moment entered the room.

"There is not a moment to be lost; Mrs. Moore is in a very weak state—in fact, I think she is dying. Are you prepared for this interview, dear Mrs. Harcourt? I fear it will be a sad trial to you, but if you have sought assistance from above, you need not fear."

"Oh, that I had a spirit such as yours, Mr. Ellerton, then I need fear no evil." Tears streamed down her cheeks, for at that moment Mr. Ellerton seemed to influence her, as had been his wont when she, a little girl, hung upon his every look and word. Since then, alas! how haughty and unsubdued had

she become! Surely chastisement was good for her, if she would submit as a little child, and apply the wisdom of the lessons set before her! Gertrude sighed to think that the scales might fall perhaps from her eyes too late.

Gertrude entered Mrs. Moore's darkened room with grief and dread pressing heavily upon her senses. Death and desolation were at work there! The uplifted lance hung over one who had once been beautiful and good, but now lay desolate and hopeless with her day of grace almost sinned away. She lay upon a humble bed in one corner of the room. As Gertrude entered she flushed painfully, uttering in a low voice, "Beautiful, and like her mother!" Her sad wan face instantly disarmed Gertrude, and resentment gave way to pity.

"You knew my mother, then," said she, taking Mrs. Moore's hand, and smiling sweetly. "You will tell me all about her; I have come to see you for that purpose, only you must not fatigue yourself too much—see, I will sit down by your side for a few moments until you have recovered yourself—you are faint. Oh! Mr. Ellerton! water, water! she is fainting."

"It is only slight, Mrs. Harcourt, she will be better soon; the excitement has been too much for her. Pour soul! she has sinned, but she has suffered too. Try to remember this when she pleads for your forgiveness on the past. See, she is better now; I will retire to the next room. If you require me, ring this hand-bell, and I shall be with you instantly."

"Why not remain, Mr. Ellerton? I have no secrets. And if this be a fearful one which she has to disclose, you should hear it as well as myself. In your integrity and judgment I have the utmost confidence. Do—do stay!"

"If you desire it I will, but I think I am better away; she will have much to tell you, which perhaps it were well you should hear alone."

"But why so, when it is evident you know all?"

"As a priest I do. In that capacity it is a sacred trust, and can never be revealed. If I remain here as a friend of yours, I might feel morally bound to give the perpetrators of so much wickedness the benefit of publicity."

Ellerton frowned angrily as he said these words, and looked so severe, Gertrude involuntarily shrank from him in surprise. Perhaps she liked and respected him all the more for it; women prefer the lion to the lamb in man.

Ellerton poured out some wine, and gave it to Mrs. Moore. She revived, and again turned her wistful gaze upon Gertrude, who returned it with a sweet encouraging smile. Ellerton noted the look, thought of her unworthy husband, and sighed deeply.

"Oh! my dear young lady, how can I commence the fearful tale of woe which will make you hate me—nay, perhaps curse me for the part I took in it? Oh! I deserve all—but be pitiful, and forgive! I have not long to live, and indeed I have suffered much, but not more than I deserve. Is there forgiveness for such a vile wretch as I? Shall I—shall

I for ever be cursed? Shall I hear *her* moans and see *her* tears in the dreadful pit whither I go, unless I gain pardon from you—from those whom I have injured, and from God?" Again she sank back exhausted. They gave her *sal volatile*, and she rallied. Gertrude threw her arms helplessly upon the table before her, and bowed her head upon them; she felt too wretched for tears, and waited with an aching heart for Mrs. Moore to unravel the mystery connected with the history of her parents.

"I need not say anything of my early life," said Mrs. Moore, with a trembling lip. "Suffice it, that my parents were gentle-people, that they died poor, and left me to battle fiercely with the stern realities of life. I was young, and some said beautiful; I met one who vowed to love and protect me always. I must not dwell upon *that* theme. I was alone and wretched. I loved Arthur Harcourt Glenmore, your husband's father, and he was—was a married man!"

"But my parents! What of them?" asked Gertrude, impatiently.

"It is a long, sad story, but I will tell all if you will be patient," replied the woman.

"A young and very handsome couple arrived in Paris. The Glenmores had lived there for some years, in order to retrench, for the family estates were encumbered when Arthur Glenmore succeeded to them, and he had soon involved them beyond redemption by an expenditure far beyond his rent-roll. He was constantly raising money, until even his solicitors, Jones, Twigg, and Son, refused to

make any further advances upon the deeds which lay in their office.

"Mr. and Mrs. Carlsford Elliott were the young couple I have named. Mr. Elliott, your father, was the only son of a rich banker; he and Mr. Glenmore had been schoolfellows, and were intimate friends. Mr. Glenmore had extraordinary influence over your father, an influence which unhappily he used most unscrupulously. Mrs. Glenmore one day surprised me by calling at my lodgings. She came in very haughtily, found her way to my room, and charged me with my guilt. I felt humbled to the dust, and could have crouched down to the very ground.

"'Woman,' she said, 'I know you love my husband. You must obey him and you must obey me. Mr. Glenmore says he will never see you again uuless you consent to do his and my bidding.'

"'Madam,' I replied, 'I am willing to make you any reparation in my power for the wrong I have done you, but though fallen thus, I am not disposed to become a slave either to you or to Mr. Glenmore.'

"'Our bidding!—will you consent to act for us?' she fiercely asked. 'If you obey, you will find I shall be your friend.'

"'May I ask what your wishes are, madam?' I asked, tremblingly.

"'That you seek Mrs. Carlsford Elliott's situation as lady's maid, and that, when appointed, you obey my further instructions.'

"'I will do so, provided I am not required to do anything dishonourable.'

"'Ha! ha!' sneered Mrs. Glenmore, "'that is good—do you believe in honour or conscience?'

"In a fortnight I was Mrs. Carlsford Elliott's maid. Oh! she was innocent, lovely, good—an angel too pure for earth! She loved her husband with blind devotion wonderful to see, for he was passionate, nay, at times even violent, and of a frightfully jealous nature. Oh! how my heart used to ache for the sweet young wife, at that time scarcely nineteen. She had, however, one intense delight, and that was her baby. She idolised her child, and could not endure to have it out of her sight many hours together. I loved both mother and child devotedly. Nay, the amiability and simple piety of my mistress had even some effect upon my character and disposition; a life of sin was becoming hateful to me.

"Mr. Glenmore, when I first knew him, had a valet named Trapps; he was a wicked, unscrupulous man, and very cunning."

Gertrude started, and raised her head from the table with a scared, frightened look.

"You know that man, madam? I understand he is again in the service of the Glenmores. He left Mr. Glenmore to go to Mr. Ethelstone, of Abbots Thorpe, an eccentric old gentleman, with one son, who offended him by marrying a young person in humble life. The Glenmores took advantage of this circumstance, and bribed Trapps to keep up the squire's wrath, and induce him to execute a Will in their favour. They were only distantly related to Mr. Ethelstone, and Harcourt Glenmore became his heir through fraud, injustice, and wrong.

He has no right to the property; it is a curse to him rather than a blessing. This man, Trapps, was, for some reason or another, completely in Mr. Glenmore's power. I always fancied he knew something about the wretched creature which, if divulged, would bring him to the gallows, and that he used this knowledge to further his own unscrupulous designs upon others."

Mrs. Moore ceased to speak; she lay back, with a face white as the pillow beneath her head.

"I am wretched, wretched, wretched!" she sobbed. "Oh, how can I—how dare I tell you the rest? Oh, for Heaven's sake, pardon, pardon! Darling mistress, your cry has gone up to heaven against me! I shall die—and what then? Oh, why did they choose *me* to work out their wicked purpose?"

"Mrs. Moore, this will never do!" said Mr. Ellerton, stepping to the bedside. "You must calm yourself, or you will not be able to proceed with this sad story. Believe me, there is mercy to be found by those who seek it with tears of true repentance. Do not enter into particulars—they harrow the feelings; state the plain facts simply."

"I will, I will, Mr. Ellerton; only have patience with me. Oh, Mrs. Harcourt, can you forgive me? —I, who deserve your hatred and curse?"

"Sins may be repented of and forgiven, when perhaps they cannot be atoned, Mrs. Moore," said Gertrude, with a calm, resigned smile. "I trust, whatever your offence against me or mine, I shall have sufficient grace in my heart to say, 'I forgive you.'"

"Bless you, bless you for those words! they are jewels too bright for me to save from the wreck of happiness! The Glenmores and Elliotts," Mrs. Moore continued, "led a very gay life in Paris, and a very unsalutary effect was produced upon Mr. Elliott by it. His best feelings and instincts were warped by dissipation and the unfortunate influence of Mr. Glenmore over his rather weak mind—an influence which eventually brought him to ruin.

"At this time a Sir Herbert Fortescue became intimate with the Elliotts and Glenmores. Sir Herbert evidently admired my mistress, and manifested many tokens of his esteem and regard; but I believe all his attentions arose from pity—pity that one, young, lovely, and unprotected as she, should be so neglected, and, rumour said, so unkindly treated, by a husband who claimed his right as a man to commit every irregularity unquestioned by his wife. The Glenmores, however, pretended not to think so, and gradually aroused Mr. Elliott's jealousy to a perfect frenzy of rage, which they had some difficulty in keeping down until, as Mr. Glenmore remarked, 'they had gained more certain proof of his wife's infidelity.'

"Sir Herbert was undoubtedly considered a gay man even in fashionable circles, and this fact made matters worse for my poor, innocent mistress, who had no friend to warn her of her danger.

"'He is a friend of my husband's; he is kind, very gentlemanly and considerate,' was one of the remarks I overheard her make to Mrs. Glenmore,

who quite agreed with her, and said 'he was an excellent creature—and such a *good* man, too!'

"I must not forget to explain that my mistress was singularly unprotected and lonely. She was the only child of an officer in the service of the East India Company—a brave and noble soldier, killed on the battle-field when she was only fifteen. Her mother had died when she was an infant; so, having no ties in India, she was sent to England with the ayah who had taken charge of her from her birth. She was placed at school by a distant relative of her father's, at whose house, two years afterwards, she met Frederick Carlsford Elliott, the handsome but ill-regulated son of Mr. Elliott, the rich banker of Lombard Street. In three months she became his wife, and was devotedly attached to him.

"Mr. Trapps was intimate with Sir Herbert's valet, and whilst their masters were at the opera, or some gay ball, they generally lounged away the evening hours in Sir Herbert's rooms. Mr. Trapps was more on the alert than usual. One night he was left alone in Sir Herbert's room, and amused himself by turning over the papers and reading the delicately tinted notes which lay upon a side-table. Among them he found a love missive, in Sir Herbert's handwriting, containing a small diamond ring for a lady's finger. Quick as thought he hid the note and ring in his bosom, and then unconcernedly turning to meet his friend at the door, said, 'I'm off now. Master will be about returning from the opera. I advise you to prepare for yours also. Good night!'

"You will wonder how I gained this information. I procured it by bribery; but that is too long a story to enter upon.

"A few days after this occurrence I received a note from Mrs. Glenmore, commanding my presence that afternoon. I went—and oh, how shall I tell you the dreadful sequel? She said she would denounce me to the world—declare I had stolen the jewelry which Mr. Glenmore had given to me, and which he had heartlessly taken from his wife's jewel-box for that purpose.

"'But, madam,' I replied, 'I did not know them to be yours. Mr. Glenmore gave them to me, and I am willing to restore them to you.'

"'What, after you have contaminated them! No, never; do not think it. Besides, Mr. Glenmore says he never gave them; that you helped yourself to the contents of my jewel-case when I was from home, and you had the audacity to enter my house.'

"'I never did enter it, except, madam, at your command. And as to your jewel-case, I never saw it in my life.'

"'Am I to believe you or Mr. Glenmore?'

"'I tell you the truth, madam.'

"'I don't believe you,' she replied; 'and the police shall be instantly summoned unless you promise to do my bidding.'

"I will not multiply words, but simply tell you that I did her bidding, which was—oh, Heaven help me to confess the horrid truth!—which was to drop Sir Herbert's note containing the ring into the

boudoir of my young mistress, to pick it up, and, in a fit of virtuous indignation, take it to my master."

"And did you do this? Did you—did you?" almost screamed Gertrude, as with wild eyes and clenched hands she rose from her seat, looking more like a fallen angel than a human being. "Woman, you dare to do this and live! Is there hope of pardon for such an act? No wonder you fear to die! No wonder you fear the torments of a future state! Oh, woman, woman, you ask me to forgive; yea, and so I could, if the sin had been against myself—but my mother! oh, my mother! surely that sweet voice still cries aloud for vengeance!"

"No, no, Mrs. Harcourt; this is wrong! Calm yourself and be wise, or perhaps you will not hear more. See, the poor thing has fainted!"

The fit lasted so long that both Mr. Ellerton and Gertrude became alarmed, and called for the friend who nursed her. Half an hour elapsed before she could resume her story. Gertrude had regained calmness, and listened with a throbbing brain and intense emotion.

"I cannot, I dare not dwell upon the dreadful scenes which followed my treacherous deed! From that moment to this I have never known peace. Never shall I forget your father's rage. He would receive no explanation; he would not listen to reason, but was maddened, and in his phrenzy struck his gentle innocent wife to the ground. We carried her to bed, insensible. 'Let her die!' he screamed,

rather than said, 'for has she not made me the laugh and scorn of men?'

"They never saw each other again. Sir Herbert Fortescue and your father met in deadly combat; Mr. Glenmore was his second, and acted a *friend's* part—that of bringing home to the house he and his wicked wife had made desolate the corpse of Frederick Carlsford Elliott. The following day you were taken away from your mother, and, according to your father's will, placed under the care of the Glenmores. Mr. Glenmore was your guardian, and was to have the full control and possession of your immense fortune until you came of age. How they fulfilled that trust is best known to you, dear madam, only the world says your fortune enriched the Glenmores, and released the title deeds of more than one of the Glenmore family estates during your childhood."

"What care I for money or estates?" said Gertrude, passionately. "Dare not to preach, but tell me what became of your victim—my poor mother?"

It was some moments before she could. The terror produced by Gertrude's words and looks overpowered her, and she sank again into a half fainting state. Her wan, pale lips moved tremulously, but no sound issued from them.

"Oh, Mr. Ellerton, I have killed her! Speak to me—speak! I forgive you all, every wrong, if you will but tell me what became of my mother. Is she alive? Can I see her? Tell me, oh! tell me for pity's sake!"

"No, no, impossible! She became a maniac, and—and died in my arms five years ago in a madhouse."

Gertrude uttered one agonised scream of horror, and fell at the side of the bed in a death-like swoon.

This last stroke had been too much for her, and it was long before she began to show any sign of returning animation. Mr. Ellerton carried her to a sofa in an adjoining room, and tenderly applied every restorative within reach.

At last she heaved a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

"Thank God you are better, dear Mrs. Harcourt," said Mr. Ellerton, who sat by her side chafing her cold hands.

A heavy cloud was upon his face, and he pressed her hand with a vehemence which told of a fierce conflict raging in his breast.

Gertrude at length was able to speak, and begged to be taken to her friend's house, Lady Emily de Vere.

"Wait a little longer—you are too weak to move at present," expostulated Mr. Ellerton.

"Oh! Mr. Ellerton, all—all this wickedness and misery again flashes upon my brain. God forgive that woman the evil she did to my poor mother!"

"Try to calm yourself, Mrs. Harcourt; in a short time you will be better, and able before you depart to speak words of comfort and peace to Mrs. Moore, who seeks your forgiveness with tears."

"Oh! that I had a better heart and more forgiving spirit, Mr. Ellerton!" Gertrude clasped her

hands convulsively, and gazed into his face with a look of woe which penetrated him deeply.

"Oh! tell me, tell me, is it insanity I have now to dread? Shall I inherit my mother's dreadful malady? Oh, I feel wild! Can it be coming? For pity, for mercy's sake, speak."

"You are excited, and that is all. Believe me, dear Mrs. Harcourt, you need not fear insanity; your poor mother's brain was turned by injustice and cruelty. She was wronged, cruelly wronged; her husband killed and her child taken from her side. Ask yourself if sorrows such as these were not sufficient to produce madness or even death itself?"

"But turn your thoughts to that poor creature in the next room," he resumed, in sad tones. "If you knew how much she suffers you would try to forgive her the injury she has done you."

"I will try. Let me not be her judge; she is soon going before a higher tribunal than any here."

With these words Gertrude arose from the sofa, calm and collected. "I must see Mrs. Moore before I go. I feel I can forgive her now, and I must tell her so."

Mr. Ellerton supported Gertrude to the door of Mrs. Moore's room. For a moment all her angry feelings were aroused by the sight of the dying woman; the next, they had passed away, and she was trying to comfort the poor penitent.

Ah! how little did she understand the sorrows of that poor fainting creature, trembling on the verge of eternity! Little did she know how that once

proud spirit had been quelled and broken, or how faded was the beauty of that once lovely being, whose perfidy had cast its blight over the innocent life of her mother!

Mrs. Moore pleaded for forgiveness with prayers and tears. Gertrude wept bitterly, and in gentle accents uttered soothing words of peace and love.

"May the Great One above forgive you your sins as I now forgive the wrong you did to my poor mother. May you die happily, and may you possess that 'peace which passeth all understanding.'"

Gertrude uttered the words with deep solemnity, and then, with one parting look at the dying woman, turned to leave the room.

Mrs. Moore made a violent effort to speak, but could not. Gertrude returned to her bedside and gazed in affright upon her altered features, whilst Mr. Ellerton bent his ear to her lips to catch her last murmured speech, for he perceived she was dying.

"The casket!" She tried to reach something from behind her pillow; he understood her wish, and brought forth a casket containing jewelry. She smiled when Mr. Ellerton placed it in Gertrude's hands. "It is yours; they were once your mother's; keep them," she softly murmured.

That night Mrs. Moore died.

CHAPTER XXXI.

We must pass over a few weeks and turn to Abbots Thorpe. Gertrude has not divulged her knowledge of Mrs. Moore's secret, or Mrs. Glenmore's perfidy; but has acted upon Mr. Ellerton's advice, and remained silent for the present. The wound, however, was there in all its bitterness; and Gertrude struggled valiantly against the spirit of revenge which seemed to hold her brain captive.

The shock occasioned by the discovery of Mrs. Glenmore's wickedness, and Mrs. Moore's subsequent death, had been very great, and the gay scenes which of necessity she had since passed through had not in the least neutralised the effect. But Gertrude had an object to gain, a purpose to carry out; so struggled successfully against her mingled feelings of sorrow and anger in order to gain the object she had in view. Sleepless nights were, however, telling fearfully upon her appearance, and even Mrs. Glenmore and Harcourt looked with interest, if not with anxiety, upon her pale sad face. Occasionally they had a few qualms of conscience; they were but momentary, and passed away unheeded, like the "still small voice" which suggested them.

Harcourt was still infatuated with Cecilia Rookes.

He rarely saw his wife, and spent his time in dissipation and excess. Often and often Gertrude looked at him with a sorrowful sigh of pity, as she noted him whirling in the dance, his cheek flushed, his eyes gleaming, his laugh wild and frequent. It was evident Harcourt had become a victim to the degrading vice of intemperance, and that he drowned his cares, his remorse, in excitement. A fierce battle was indeed raging in his breast, and he determined to free himself as soon as possible from his thraldom. "What a fool I was to marry!" was his frequent exclamation. "And what an ass to live in this vile hole in perpetual terror of that traitor, Trapps, who knows all, and could any hour, if he liked, turn my mother and myself beggars into the street, and set up that other representative ass, Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, Esquire, in the home of his fathers!"

And all this time poor Gertrude's thoughts constantly turned upon the emancipation of her husband from the miseries attending his false position. Once get rid of Mrs. Glenmore, and her wifely influence over Harcourt might be established. "But Cecilia Rookes!" thought Gertrude, with a flashing eye and a throbbing heart; "it is evident he loves her, and that—that he hates me. Perhaps I have been too cold, too distant, and have not entered sufficiently into his mode of thought and feeling. Oh! if I could persuade him to give up Abbots Thorpe to its rightful owner, to separate from his mother, to forget Cecilia Rookes, and dismiss Trapps, all might yet be well, and we might be happy still!

Poor fellow! his heart is in the right place, only warped by the unhappy influences surrounding him."

Notwithstanding the gay company assembled at Abbots Thorpe, a cloud hung over the place. There was a change which every one *felt* but could not define. Mrs. Glenmore and Harcourt were frequently silent and abstracted. It was evident that some serious thought was uppermost, which even their guarded efforts could not dissemble. They were frequently closeted together for hours, and after these interviews generally emerged pale and careworn. Harcourt's manner to his mother had also changed. They now very frequently had high words, and he had grown not merely cold, but brusque and harsh, finding fault with all she said and did, whilst he seemed to take a sullen pleasure in wounding her feelings.

"Toil, toil, toil; bubble, care, and trouble!" And why, Mrs. Glenmore? The golden idol, Mammon, whom you worship, only forges chains for his slaves wherewith to bind them to misery. Too late, perhaps, all his votaries discover this.

The splendid rooms at Abbots Thorpe were prepared for theatricals and a grand ball. All the guests were to depart the following day, and Mrs. Glenmore had decided that this last evening should be as brilliant as she could make it. The lights were gleaming; the eyes of the fair *danseuses* flashing. Music in bewitching strains delighted the ear, and the perfume of flowers ravished the senses. There was everything to feast the eye and to charm the fancy—a paradise filled with graces, but very

envious ones! Who would have thought that that fair girl, with soft blue eyes and Madonna face, drinking in the vapid compliments addressed to her by that aristocratic "Dundreary" at her side, is forgetting her vows of love given a fortnight ago to poor Captain Fairlee. But then, Dundreary is a lord, and that makes all the difference. Truly, a ball-room, could we see it as the angels do above, would make us quail in an agony of dread before the Gorgon heads of our depraved humanity.

"Object to balls!" said a clergyman once; "no, I have no objection to a ball, but much, very much, to the envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness which it develops." Let these be discarded, innocent mirth reign supreme, and the ball-room will no longer be an offence to the conscientious.

Let us use the world and its gaieties with the chastened thought prominently before us, "how shall we not abuse it?" Then we shall learn to understand that this is a far better discipline of the Christian character than to stay at home, with a repining sour spirit, talking morality for the gratification of that pride which is so ready to whisper, "Stand aside, worldlings, for am I not better than you?"

Gertrude is there, beautiful, most beautiful! but tell me if that quick flashing eye, heightened colour, parted lips, and those impatient answers to the fashionable satellites who revolve around her, speak of happiness? No, she is wretched, and her eye wanders restlessly through the crowd.

"How beautiful Mrs. Harcourt looks to-night!" is the general exclamation. "And what an infa-

tuated fool that fellow Harcourt is to neglect her for a full-blown rose, the *fair* Cecilia!"

"Haw, haw," laughed a young fellow with a weak, white face, and thin, light moustache, which he constantly twirled into small snakes, "how can you expect a fellow to be in love with his own wife?"

"And the fellow who is not deserves to be hanged," said Harry Verner, who came up at that instant and laughingly assumed the tone and style of his friend.

"Do you think so? That may be a matter of opinion; but for mercy's sake, dear fellow, spare your words, morals, and—a discussion."

Harry did not hear the rejoinder; he sought Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore. "Ah! I have found you at last," he said, as he entered a small room which led to a conservatory. "Dear Mrs. Harcourt, you promised me the next dance."

"I am tired, Harry—sick of dancing, lights, flowers, flounces, and flirtations! Is there such a thing as *heart* to be found in all this throng? Oh, Harry, promise me when you have a wife of your own, that you never leave or forsake her for others! A neglected wife is indeed a wretched thing—better strangle her at once."

"I never will, dear Mrs. Harcourt; I should love her too well for that. I am only afraid I should bore her with too much attention, and look silly."

They heard voices in the conservatory—Harcourt's and Cecilia Rookes's. Harcourt spoke in an excited tone, and with impassioned earnestness. It was evident he was trying to persuade his companion into something.

"It cannot be," said Cecilia, with a calm cold voice, strangely at variance with the excitement of her companion. "I tell you, Harcourt, I have already risked too much for your sake. My reputation is at stake; in fact, even now you must see to what a wretched pass your attentions have brought me. These people, your friends, cut me right and left. I have not spoken to a single *lady* to-night with the exception of your mother."

"I fear, dear girl, you *are* already compromised, therefore why care for the tattle of the world—fly with me—let us leave this accursed spot. Will you not risk all for my sake?"

"Your wife, Harcourt! your wife! Should I ever know happiness if I injured her thus? and once away from her, would not your affection for me, the *plain* Cecilia Rookes, quickly pass away, only to return with redoubled ardour to the *beautiful Gertrude!*" The sneer which accompanied these words was patent to the ear of Harry and Gertrude, though they could not see it.

"The beautiful Gertrude!" replied Harcourt, passionately. "I wonder where her beauty lies! Cecilia, I hate her. I never married her for love, but for money, and could fly to Hades to be rid of her! I love you, I adore you, and yet I carry hung about my neck the dead weight of a wife whom I detest."

Harry muttered "wretches" between his teeth, and tried to lead Gertrude from the room.

She sat spell-bound, and white as the dress in which she was clad, whilst her parted lips looked

too parched and strained with agony ever to meet again.

"Would that I could save my husband!" was her first hysterical exclamation. "Shall I—shall I break in upon them as they stand there with their guilty avowal still warm on their lips? or—or—what shall I do? Oh! mercy, mercy!"

"Surely a lifetime of misery would not atone for this heartless treachery! Base fellow! he is unworthy your love, Mrs. Harcourt. Think of him in his true character, and the blow will have lost its power to wound."

Gertrude did not hear Harry, but arose from her chair and walked to the conservatory with a blank look of horror in her eyes. Harry saw there would be a scene, so, like the good fellow he was, ran to lock the outer door of the narrow passage which led to this suite of rooms.

When Gertrude appeared before the guilty pair all the blood in Harcourt Glenmore's body seemed to be driven back to his heart, and he endured one of those sensations in which are concentrated the shame and agony of a life, but it quickly passed away, leaving him stolid and cold as ever to his poor wife. And yet even now he was forced to do justice to the character of Gertrude, for he knew her to be pure and patient to the very inmost depths of that heart which he had done so much to trouble and break.

Cecilia Rookes turned to pluck a flower to hide her confusion, and then with bold effrontery exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs. Harcourt, this is an unexpected pleasure! Mr. Glenmore and I were so overheated after

the last valse, we turned into this conservatory to cool."

"No, Cecilia Rookes, you did not turn in here for that purpose, but for another and very wicked object. I have heard all. I was in the next room when you entered this. Oh! listen to a warning voice, and do not believe *that* to be love which separates a man from his lawful wife to make you the victim of his selfishness! Oh! by all the love one woman owes another, I implore, I conjure you to give up Harcourt, and to say you will never see him more! For mercy's sake refuse to take the step to which he urges you—it will lead only to misery here, and destruction hereafter. Oh! what can I say to move you!" said Gertrude in an agony, as she perceived Cecilia's high-flown look, and her husband's sneering lip. "On my knees, I, his wife, beg, implore, entreat, and will give you all I possess if you will promise me to part now, and for ever, from my husband!"

"Ha! ha! rather insulting, too! Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore thinks to *buy* you off! Well, Cecilia, say you will consider the subject well; give it your serious attention before our final arrangements are made. For my part, madam, I think you and I may as well say adieu now, in order to spare you the pain of an agonising parting. 'Pon my honour! I had no idea my wife adored me thus! Ha! ha! it is a great pity so much love should be thrown away upon one who values it so littls!" Gertrude turned deadly pale, and would have fallen to the ground but for Cecilia Rookes's encircling arm.

"Contaminate me not by your touch!" said Gertrude with flashing eyes, as she shrank from Cecilia. "Oh! Harcourt, Harcourt! how can you be so cruel? But it is the last straw which breaks the camel's back, and this you have now lain upon me! You say you never loved me, and yet I have loved you very dearly," she added with a shiver, "and would even now save you from impending ruin. Oh! think, is it nothing to trample down every holy tie and feeling in order to make yourself the companion of one whom you will ever after cease to respect? Harcourt, I love you still; but fear not—from this moment I trouble you no more. Better, far better to part than be tied to one whose hatred is so intense as yours! May you never suffer what I now feel, and may you never experience remorse for the past," said she, with streaming eyes. "Farewell, Harcourt! We part, but remember, not yet; before that day I must rid you of one who is helping on your final ruin. I allude to Mr. Trapps. I know all—beware! And let your wicked mother beware also," added Gertrude, fired with indignation, as she saw Harcourt take Cecilia Rookes's hand, and, drawing it through his arm, prepare (as he remarked with bravado) "to close the scene."

Gertrude cast one sorrowfully indignant glance upon them ere she turned to leave the conservatory. At the passage door she found Harry Verner keeping guard and awaiting her reappearance.

"I am thankful you have come at last, dear Mrs. Harcourt! Why talk to your husband? he is incorrigible—that wretched girl and Abbots Thorpe

together have ruined him. But how pale you are! You are faint; sit here, and I will bring you some wine."

"No, no, Harry, thank you; I will go to my own room. If any one should remark upon my absence, say I have a headache, and am unable to dance to-night. I shall be better soon." She rose with a forced smile, and Harry supported her to her own room.

"Harry, will you promise me to be my friend and help me?"

"That I will, dear Mrs. Harcourt; from my heart I say it."

"Will you once again assume the dress of Squire Ethelstone and personate the ghost? If you will meet me two hours hence in the tapestried chamber in the east wing next the chapel, I will tell you more."

"I will! do not fear—*au revoir*."

"We shall have a jolly spree to-night," thought Harry, as he hastened through the passages and picture gallery, to rejoin the dancers.

Gertrude turned the key in her door, and throwing herself by the bed-side, gave way to a paroxysm of grief. Sorrow and anger alternately swept their turbid waves over her troubled soul; the struggle was bitter, but she came forth a calm, trustful woman. Surely, her spirit would yet find peace, for was not her hand even then being taught to clasp the blessed staff which would support her steps up the rugged paths of life!

"Poor, poor Harcourt!" she murmured. "What

can I do to save him? Shall I see him again, and try once more to win him from his evil courses? Oh, that cold, subtle creature! No wonder she has lowered his estimate of women! Shall I go to him? Oh, Harcourt! Harcourt! how wretched, how debased, how deceived you are! No, no; there is no hope unless I recover the Will, and obtain from fear what I cannot gain by love or money. It must, it shall be done! Why should I fear? The remembrance of my mother's wrongs ought to nerve my spirit and give me strength to act."

Gertrude walked to a small cabinet; she touched a spring, and a secret door flew open, revealing a quantity of bright jewelry and a note tied round with a piece of silk. Her breast heaved with a convulsive sob.

"And this—this," taking the note, "was the instrument of murder!" The large drops gathered and chased each other down her cheeks. "Oh, my mother! shall I not revenge your injuries upon the head of that unworthy woman? Yes, I will convict her in her guilt!"

Hastily, and with trembling fingers, she unclasped every article of jewelry she wore, casting them from her with a look of disdain, because given to her on her wedding-day. She then took from the drawer, first a necklace, diamonds and emeralds, of a peculiar and antiquated fashion, this she put around her throat; then a bracelet, a brooch, and rings, until she had the whole set upon her person. When thus adorned, she stood before the glass, and surveyed herself with a flashing eye and

an angry brow. The next instant she sank down upon the couch in utter prostration of spirit, and remained for some time perfectly still, with her head resting in her hands. When she did move, it was to rise from her seat with a self-reliant smile, and a brow which spoke of a mind strung up to act out a settled determination. Five minutes later, and Gertrude was wending her way, pale, but self-possessed, through the gay throngs, who greeted her return with delight.

"Would she dance? Just one little valse? Do, do, Mrs. Harcourt! don't leave us again; the sun of joy has set when you depart," said the weak young Dundreary with snaky moustache.

"And, my good fellow," said Harry Verner, who was in the group, and came to Gertrude's rescue, "your wit comes and goes like lightning, 'ere one can say it lightens.'"

"Haw! haw! all my friends say it flashes brilliantly, Harry. So glad you have the good sense to—to——"

"To appreciate it," suggested Harry.

Gertrude pleaded headache, and asked for Mrs. Glenmore, whom she wished to see. Twenty young fellows were ready to escort her to the next room, declaring they had seen her there only a few minutes since.

"I have just left her," said Harry, "so I claim the privilege of taking you to her at once."

"She is there, Harry—there, in the card-room. saw her when that door opened, playing cards with Sir James Penketh," said Gertrude, excitedly,

as they passed along the suite of rooms in search of her.

"Harry, leave me. Don't stay now; but meet me according to promise, in an hour, at the little oriel window in the east wing nearest the chapel."

"I will not fail. In an hour?"

"Yes, an hour. All these people will be leaving then. Say to inquirers that I find myself so unwell I am compelled to retire. Say how sorry I am. White lies, you know, are necessary—in society."

Gertrude looked so strange, so different to her usual "self," that Harry turned from her anxiously, to hide the tears which had started to his honest eyes, and muttered, "Poor thing! her sorrows are not over yet. Harcourt is bent upon eloping with Cecilia Rookes. He says so. Well, let them go; they deserve no better fate, a couple of mad fools!"

Gertrude walked with a stately step and a flashing eye straight to the card-table at which Mrs. Glenmore and her favourite partner, Sir James Penketh, were playing whist, and stood behind Sir James's chair, directly opposite to Mrs. Glenmore, who was too intent upon the game to observe her.

At length, during the next deal, she slowly raised her eyes, and said, "Is that you, Mrs. Harcourt? Where *have* you been all the evening? There have been a hundred and one inquiries about you."

Whilst speaking, her cheek blanched and her lip quivered. She tried to recover her equanimity, but could not.

"Oh, you tremble, madam, do you?" thought Gertrude, with a pitiless frown. "You see them,

do you? Yes, yes, she is guilty — guilty — and deserves her misery!"

"Water! — wine! — brandy!" called out the alarmed trio at the table as they observed Mrs. Glenmore's ghastly face.

She waved her hand in her own queenly way, and gasped, "Air—a little air for heaven's sake! That is all I require, nothing more, to recover from this slight faintness!"

They supported her to the nearest couch. Gertrude leaned over her and whispered, "You know these jewels, madam. I have the note, too, a pink one, containing a diamond ring which once belonged to Sir Herbert Fortescue, and which, according to your directions, Margaret Graham, *alias* Mrs. Moore, picked up in my mother's boudoir, and gave to my father, your *friend*, Frederick Carlsford Elliott. The rest I need not tell you—you know all, and the day of reckoning is at hand!"

"Mrs. Glenmore is quite better now," said Gertrude, with outward calmness, to the group, who had retired from the sofa where she was lying; "so much better, I am quite able to leave her. Doubtless, in a few moments she will resume her whist. *Au revoir!*" she said, with a forced smile.

"What can it all mean?" asked old Lady Charlotte Cranmore. "Surely since that ghost scene last year, Abbots Thorpe, and all in it, are sadly changed."

"By-the-bye, a second edition of that episode wouldn't be pleasant, would it?" asked Sir James.

"Ill-gotten wealth brings its own reward sooner

or later. I wonder how the Glenmores could retain Abbots Thorpe, knowing so well whose it ought to be. I am sure, had it been *my* case, I should have made restitution at once!"

The old lady turned up her eyes, and looked around to have her virtue rewarded.

"I am sure *you* would, dear Lady Charlotte!" said a toady of the first water, who felt the old body's pulse daily, and noted the state of her digestion from interested motives. She expected a legacy when those poor old feet were cold, and those aged eyes were dimmed to this world for ever.

Mrs. Glenmore *did* resume her whist. She made a violent effort to recover her equanimity, and succeeded. The cost, however, to her overstrung nerves was immense; but never had Mrs. Glenmore appeared to greater advantage or been more gracious. She laughed at her sudden indisposition, and said "it was strange, because she had never been ill in her life, and only knew *sal volatile* by name, and not as a reality."

Little did the three individuals who played whist with Mrs. Glenmore dream of the horrid strife raging within that round and lovely bosom! Remorse had awakened from its sullen slumber, and now coiled, black and cold, around her heart. How she longed to be alone! How she pined for the quiet of her own room, as she sat smiling, and looking so supremely happy, keeping up the ball of gay and sparkling conversation even until the last guest had left the now deserted rooms, and said "Good night!"

Ah, Mrs. Glenmore! such courage, such endurance,

and such determination to over-ride your difficulties, are worthy a better cause! How will it be, too, when alone — alone in the cold dark night, with the bright stars above, to gleam and flash upon you until memory recalls the past, and you think, if man knows not your guilt, the unseen cloud of witnesses will some day testify against you?

CHAPTER XXXII.

GERTRUDE and Harry Verner were in deep conversation in the oriel chamber. Harry's face looked grave and thoughtful.

"Dear Mrs. Harcourt, you only insinuate what I have long ago suspected."

"Harry, there is no suspicion on my part; it is a certainty; and will you help me to do an act of justice to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone?"

"That I will, for he is a good fellow! I know him well. But tell me all the particulars, and give me your directions as plainly and concisely as possible, for if we remain much longer here we shall certainly be discovered. By-the-bye, too, have you secured the old squire's mask and dress? If you have not, our 'ghostly' intentions will be frustrated."

"Oh, Harry, Harry, don't make a joke of it! Oh, where shall I find help?" she exclaimed, wildly clasping her hands, as bitter tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Indeed, Mrs. Harcourt, you may trust me. I swear to you I will do all you ask, and more, a thousand times more! For did you not smooth

away every difficulty with Annette's father? and did you not make Annette my own, my very own intended wife? In three months she will be mine! Thanks, a thousand thanks to you for it!"

"Bless you both!" said Gertrude, with her own kind smile. "Yes, Harry, I know we understand each other, and that you will do your best to serve me."

"That I will. But tell me, how did you discover Mr. Trapps had possession of another Will in Hugh Ethelstone's favour?"

"That I do not know for a certainty; but this I know, that he possesses documents which he hides away, and is dreadfully fearful of losing. Nightly he sees that his treasure is safe before he goes to-bed, and he gloats over papers which he brings out of a trap-door let into the floor of the room."

"And how did you discover this, Mrs. Harcourt?"

"Don't mention names lest we should be heard; and whisper." They sat on a settee near the beautiful oriel window, through which a flood of pale blue moonlight streamed across the tesselated floor, and on to the picture of an old, grim-looking Ethelstone crusader, who frowned down upon the world beneath him with the *hauteur* becoming his ancient name and lineage.

"I will tell you," replied Gertrude. "You remember the closet in which, after our first ghost adventure, we hid the old squire's mask and clothes?"

"Yes, well. It was a grim-looking hole, full of

all sorts of outlandish things, and you feared to enter on account of the rats."

"I soon lost that fear, however, and by my courage gained a clue to Mr. Trapps's treachery and secret. It was in this way. One day a sudden thought seized me, and I determined to possess myself of the old squire's mask and clothes. I had a little lantern in my room, one of Harcourt's, which he gave me, a curiosity. It is of French manufacture, and is wonderfully contrived to show different lights, and a dark side. I waited one night until a late hour to carry out my intention. I reached the closet in safety, secured the clothes and mask, and was just turning to leave the place when I heard a scraping noise, and through a high small window placed nearly at the top of the closet, perceived a flickering light. Some unaccountable feeling took possession of me, and I felt that I could not leave the place until I had looked through that window and discovered what lay behind. I looked around, carrying my lamp very carefully, in order not to attract notice; and Fortunatus surely favoured my wishes, for there, in one corner, was a long ladder reared against the wall. With eager hands I seized upon the ladder, and managed to turn it along the wall until under the little window. I then darkened my lantern completely, and mounted to the window. I thought I should have dropped at the sight which met my view! There was Trapps down upon his knees with a lantern by his side, and his right arm thrust into a large cavity in the floor, out of which he brought forth a number

of parcels, one of which was evidently parchment, and looked like a Will. Oh! how my heart beat! He then rose from his knees, and placing his lantern upon an old settee, settled himself down like a tailor upon the floor, to examine their contents. The document came first. This he gloated over with *such* a smile—oh! I shall never forget his horrid face! Harry, I am certain that very paper is the squire's lost Will, and that Trapps is the villain who stole it. That paper I must—I will have to-night. Well, the other things appeared to contain money and jewelry, but these I did not care about. At last he replaced the papers within the aperture, thrusting his arm far, very far down, and then quietly slid the two planks back again into their places—he touched a certain spot on the board and it went back without leaving the least trace of an opening. That was sufficient for one night. I determined to use the clue thus accidentally discovered, and, if possible, gain possession of that document. It is a secret chamber, but by perseverance and determination I have at last found access to it; and now all that remains to be done is to perfect our plans in order to facilitate the possession of those papers."

"Yes, I see at once how that must be done," said Harry. "You doubtless remember Mr. Trapps's terror the night I became the old squire's ghost."

"That I do well," replied Gertrude; "I shall never forget his look of horror!"

"Why, he almost confessed his guilt! Depend upon it, Mrs. Harcourt, that document is"—(Don't,

don't mention names," she whispered)—"is the lost Will of old Squire Ethelstone."

Gertrude would not for worlds have given utterance to her thoughts, or might have added, "Yes, and Mrs. Glenmore and my husband know there is such a Will, but have not the honesty to confess the fact, and make restitution to the rightful heir." She might have said, too, that it was the knowledge of this fact which was driving Harcourt to desperation, and making him the sinner he was. Harcourt was an impostor; he lived and enjoyed the inheritance of another, conscious that it was not his, that he had no right to it, and that he bribed a bad man to keep the secret of his guilt. Thus he had admitted the plausible Mephistophiles who walked at his elbow to a conference upon his personal interests, and as a natural consequence he was a slave to the raging Titan who now held him as his own, and led him on, step by step, to destruction and death.

"I believe it, Harry. I believe Harcourt has no right to Abbots Thorpe, and that he will never know goodness or happiness until the day Hugh Atheling Ethelstone be reinstated in the house of his fathers," replied Gertrude, after a remark of Harry's.

"But how is this to be accomplished? What can I do to further so desirable an end?" he asked.

"Simply this, Harry. Take these clothes and this mask which are here ready for you, and make yourself as like that picture of the old squire in your bed-room as possible. Then emerge from your room unseen by any one, and walk up and down the

gallery which leads to the shut-up suite of apartments in the west wing."

Harry did not quite relish this; he had heard queer stories about those deserted chambers. Besides, what if any of the household, not recognising him as the squire's prototype, should rush upon him in the dim uncertain light? What if there should be a struggle, a chance blow? Untoward consequences might ensue. He was not afraid for himself, he only knew fear as a name, but if discovered, he naturally dreaded the construction which might be put upon his motive for assuming such a disguise.

Gertrude perceived he hesitated, and said, "Harry, if you care not to help me to do an act of justice, I absolve you from your promise, and will carry out my intention myself; I have no fear, and have too much at stake to allow a dread of consequences to overpower my resolution."

"So be it; let us act out the programme, take the consequences whatever they may be, and gain possession of Mr. Trapps's secret."

As quickly as possible they matured their plans, and then parted to carry them out.

During this conference between Gertrude and Harry Verner, a strange scene was being enacted in another part of the house.

Mrs. Glenmore, Harcourt, and Mr. Trapps were together, and discussed affairs with countenances which plainly spoke of the different emotions conflicting within them.

"Harcourt, shut those doors, the inner and outer,"

commanded Mrs. Glenmore. "The servants are not all in bed, and Mr. Trapps might suffer considerably were they to overhear this conversation."

"Let them hear, I care not!" replied Harcourt, who was flushed and excited to a painful degree. "But I will shut the doors, for, after all, this is an unpleasant business. Experience, too, even makes fools wise; I caught a whole pack of rascals, madam, listening at your door no later than yesterday."

Mrs. Glenmore deigned no reply, but desired Mr. Trapps to proceed, and reveal the full purport of his intrusion upon her privacy at that unseemly hour.

"Oh yes, madam, I can soon come to the point—have done with the business—wash my hands, as the saying is, of the whole affair."

"But can you—tell me, Mr. Trapps—wash the sin of your evil deeds from your soul? Tell me that—tell me that ere you preach to me of washing your hands of *my* affairs?" said Mrs. Glenmore, rising with the dignity of a Siddons, and appalling Trapps with her commanding mien, as she glided past him with a menacing gesture, sweeping her ruby velvet train behind her.

"I—I did not mean that," said he, trembling in every limb; "perhaps, madam, you will permit me to explain myself?"

"That depends upon circumstances," she replied haughtily.

Trapps glanced from Mrs. Glenmore to Harcourt with a sinister look. "Mr. Glenmore, perhaps you will soften matters, and enable me to gain a fair hearing from my mistress."

"Oh! old sinner, you are just as well able to talk as I am; I've done with you and your villanous plotting. This time next week I shall be—well no matter where, only remember, Trapps, you screwed your last thousand out of me on Monday. Take your own course—tell all; I care not to retain this hateful hole another day!" Harcourt threw himself carelessly upon the nearest couch, and hummed a popular air.

"Mrs. Glenmore, and Mr. Harcourt, once for all, I have come to warn you, and to serve you if possible. Madam, my worst suspicions have received confirmation. The game is up! Already Mrs. Banks, the post-mistress, and her daughter, are in prison; they are certain to implicate us—you, madam, as well as myself, because Mrs. Banks knows how many letters I brought here for you to read. The great detective, Brownlow Rigg, has taken up his quarters at the 'Golden Lion,' and Hugh Atheling Ethelstone is here, staying with the Leslies, which I know to my cost, and his future destruction!" he hissed forth between his clenched teeth.

"Explain yourself more clearly, Mr. Trapps," replied Mrs. Glenmore, with a slightly nervous twitch of the lips which he did not fail to observe.

"Two days ago, when walking along the lane in a lonely part, I met Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, who shook me until every bone in my body seemed ready to drop out, and not satisfied with that, flung me into a pit at the other side of the lane, where he left me more dead than alive, saying he would not deprive the gallows of its own."

"Ha, ha! that was capital! Serve you right,

too, Trapps, for you are a scoundrel! But I am tired. I shall go to bed and leave you to settle these affairs."

"You had better stay, sir," replied Trapps. "I assure you things are more serious than you seem to imagine."

"No, I had better go! Good night!" Without another word the heartless young man left his mother to contend alone with Mr. Trapps. And perhaps it was well, for there was much in the history of his parents which to him had ever been as a sealed book.

"So, madam, now I may as well tell you I must either make a clean breast of everything, and die, rot in prison until the gallows claim me, or destroy the Will in Hugh Atheling Ethelstone's favour, and make off as quickly as possible for America. Either course is agreeable to me; it is for you to decide which will be the most prudent one for me to pursue. Let us just consider matters well, madam," said the impudent man, with assumed composure; "this is how we stand: in the first place, if I confess all, what will become of *you*, Mrs. Glenmore? That Elliott business was ugly, and would look unpleasant in print. Your bribes, threats, and persuasions to induce me to get possession of old Squire Ethelstone's *last* Will would not look much better. Then there would be all about Mrs. Harcourt's money, and many other equally *honourable* transactions which I should feel it a *religious* duty to divulge."

"Wretch! I defy you!" exclaimed Mrs. Glenmore, livid with rage.

"Wait a moment, madam—we have considered one

side of the question, now let us take the other. *If* I destroy the Will—*if* I burn it before your eyes—*if* I make off to America without telling any tales, it will save you much trouble. But if I agree to this, it must be on the condition that you sign this paper, making over to me the sum of five thousand pounds. When you agree to this, and have signed this paper, I will place the old squire's Will safe and snug in your possession."

Mrs. Glenmore looked at the vile little fellow with a flashing eye, and a lip which, at the moment, disdained to reply.

At length she slowly uttered, "Never, never! Do your worst; I defy you!"

"And that worst, madam, is to tell everything, and restore Abbots Thorpe to its rightful heir. When this is done, what will the world say of Mrs. Glenmore? A paltry sum like that I name would be well spent, madam, in saving you from the contempt and abhorrence of society."

Mrs. Glenmore was too proud to utter the groan of agony which rose to her lips. She arose from her seat, and stood erect, but pale, at the table.

"Show me the paper, Mr. Trapps! Place it here before me!" she commanded, in a voice which sounded harsh and strange.

Trapps shuffled round to where the queenly woman stood, and with shaking hands spread the paper before her.

"Upon two conditions I sign this paper, and these conditions are, that within the next half hour you place the Will in favour of Hugh Atheling

Ethelstone in my hands; and that before this time to-morrow you sail for America or Australia, first making a solemn oath never to see me or England again."

"That will just suit my book. I am quite ready to agree to your terms, therefore the sooner you sign this paper the better perhaps for both of us."

"Not until you have fulfilled the most important part of our compact. Place the Will in my hands, and then I sign. Leave the room! I wait here half an hour; if you have not returned by that time I shall consider the matter ended, and affairs must take their own course. And remember, Trapps, *I* possess that which will, any day I choose, bring you to the gallows. Leave me! Quick! I give you half an hour. Remember!"

Mrs. Glenmore had confronted Trapps, and gave him a look before which he quailed visibly, and left the room with silent dread.

"Vile Caliban!" muttered Mrs. Glenmore, with a trembling lip. "Surely the Gehenna of that man's presence has haunted me long enough! The Will! the Will! Once let me have it in my possession, and Trapps gone, I can defy the world! Oh, the torture of such a life as this! And why do I endure it? Harcourt is unkind, ungrateful, and fast going to ruin. I have lost all control over him, poor, poor, deluded boy! But those jewels Gertrude wore? Can all be discovered? Does she know all? Who can have been her informant? If she has gained this knowledge I am in her power, and may well dread the effect of her anger. Yes;

why disguise the fact? she can compass my ruin. Can Margaret Graham be still alive? No, that is impossible! Did I not receive certain intelligence of her death years ago? Then how could she have gained possession of those jewels and that note? Perhaps I have been deceived, and Margaret is not dead. What if it be so? Surely the word of a vile creature such as she, must be, nay, shall be, considered worthless. I must see Gertrude to-morrow, and demand an explanation of her disgraceful conduct to-night."

Mrs. Glenmore had been pacing the room with agitated steps during this soliloquy. She was alone, and could allow her countenance to be the true index to her mind, and it told of a very sad and anxious heart. Once or twice she drew her hand across her brow, pushing back her hair, and discovering many a grey lock beneath those lovely golden ringlets. There was no tear in her eye, but a look —such a look of anguish and thought in her face! She sat down at a small writing-table, and wrote a short note to Gertrude, demanding a personal explanation on the morrow.

The morrow! Mrs. Glenmore's morrow! Where would that be spent?

We must follow Trapps as he wended his way along the deserted passages and galleries which led to his own room. All was dark and silent, with the exception of occasional gleams of moonlight streaming through the windows and the weird tappings of ivy branches against the panes. The wind was gradually rising, and dark clouds obscured the

moon, producing shadows which seemed to Trapps's craven spirit as so many spectres lying across his path.

Ah! it is the joy of the faithful only to lean in darkness upon an arm Divine! to see the bright spirits hidden behind the angry clouds, and know the beauty of their protecting smile as they look down upon our path!

Trapps knew no such joy; but only woe—woe—because his heart was filled with evil, and he only heard an accusing voice in the rolling thunder, the rustling leaves, and the moaning wind.

Bent upon his project, however, and with the shivery feel that "the devil takes the hindmost," he stealthily glided along the passages to his own bedroom. From thence he came forth carrying a lantern, which he turned against the walls on either side, to make sure he was alone. He had some distance to go, for the secret chamber where he had hidden the old squire's Will lay at the other end of the house, and was almost blocked up with the new apartments. In fact, the Glenmore household had no idea that such a room was in existence, as the window had long ago been blocked up with a new wall, and the door was concealed by a large pier-glass, which completely filled the aperture. The old squire had had this glass let into the door to cover it, and there was a spring at the side, which yielded to pressure, and gave access to the chamber. Trapps touched this spring, and carefully drawing the door after him, passed into the apartment. There was a damp, sickly smell in the room, which

seemed to Trapps unearthly. His limbs trembled, and he could scarcely gain sufficient courage to look around. Some people say man's courage depends upon his digestion; I say it depends upon the state of his conscience! Here was Trapps trembling like an aspen leaf because he was a bad man, and was going to do a bad act; whilst Gertrude Glenmore, half an hour before, had been there in all the strength of a virtuous resolve, and had solved the mystery of that darkened, ghostly room, without dread of anything or any one except Mr. Trapps.

He placed his lantern upon the floor, at the foot of a huge bed, the rich hangings of which let down a shower of dust as he attempted to draw them aside. There was no time for fear or consideration, so he commenced at once to turn up an old piece of tattered carpet which covered the centre of the room. The next instant he was down upon his knees, with his right arm thrust through a cavity in the floor which he had made by sliding back two of the oaken planks. Farther and farther he thrust his arm, on this side and on that. Then the perspiration stood upon his brow like large beads, and his eyes glared wildly around. His heart beat fast and loud; you might have heard its great thumps against his breast had you been at the other side of the bed. Again, again, and again he sought for the papers, but they were not there—no, they had disappeared; and in passing his hand to and fro, he only sent up a cloud of dust which choked him, and caused the water to flow from his eyes. But no superficial search would content him. Perhaps he had thrust them too far

back. With almost superhuman effort he tore up the planks on either side to look for the missing Will. It was not there; only dust and rubbish remained—the Will, the papers, had gone!

"Gone! gone!" he uttered in abject terror. Then, with oaths too fearful to write, he threw himself upon the ground, and kicked and raved in impotent fury. Self-preservation, however, is nature's first law in the mind of a coward. Trapps remembered it was not safe to remain longer there, so seized his lantern and prepared to depart, with a face more like a baffled fiend's than a man's. He cared not to shut the glass door now; no, all the world might see it for aught he cared; so he left it wide open. He passed through the two chambers which led to the landing and galleries beyond, with curses upon his lips to keep up his courage; but it was no use—his teeth chattered, and his limbs refused to carry him farther—he was compelled to support himself against the wall.

"Mercy—mercy! Master—master! I haven't got it—no, it's gone! See—see, it is not here! Somebody else has it now. Oh, oh! mercy, mercy, mercy!" groaned Trapps, as he sank in affright upon the floor, and tried to hide his face behind the window drapery, near which he crouched.

"The Will—the Will, Trapps!" uttered a deep, sepulchral voice. "You are cursed—cursed for the evil you have done to me and mine!"

It was the old squire's ghost. Trapps doubted not the fact, and lay upon the ground in terror. He dare not look or rise from the floor; his very heart

seemed to stop, and then "knock at his ribs" with fearful throbs.

"You infernal coward!" thought Harry Verner behind the old squire's mask, as he drew his ghostly drapery around him, and with a step like Hamlet's father, passed away, leaving Trapps more dead than alive. Once out of ear-shot, and Harry ran along the passages until he reached Gertrude's door.

"All right, Mrs. Harcourt! all right! I have done my part, and left the old rascal so stunned and frightened, I should not be surprised if he were defunct before daylight."

"Where is he?" asked Gertrude.

"In the gallery which leads to the mysterious chamber, quite safe, and very quiet. I don't think he suspects anything. Have you all safe? This has indeed been a perilous game for you to play, dear Mrs. Harcourt, but you are rewarded, though I would rather that Will and those papers were out of your hands, and in safe keeping. What will you do with them? the responsibility is fearful—don't you feel it so, and ask 'what next?'"

"What next, Harry? Bed, I say, for I am completely worn out with fatigue and anxiety. Here is a letter, a statement of the truth. Will you take it, and if anything should happen to me, give it to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone?"

"I will. Do not fear!"

"What an awful night!" said Gertrude, with a shudder.

"It is indeed! How tired you look. Good night, and God bless you, dear Mrs. Harcourt!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was all an excuse; Gertrude was neither tired nor sleepy; excitement prevented her feeling either one or the other. She drew up the blind in her bedroom, and looked out on the night. Painful thoughts crowded upon her, and she longed to be at rest.

"How sublime the grand rolling of the sea! truly it tells of the Eternal! But what a dreadful storm must be raging for me to hear it so distinctly! Poor—poor Harcourt! If I could only win his love, and try to enter into all his pursuits like *she* does!"

It was true Gertrude had so far carried out her scheme successfully, but the thought suggested by Harry Verner, "What next?" began to haunt her painfully. She possessed the lost Will; but when given up to the true heir, "what next?" The Glenmores would be ruined, and she, Harcourt's wife, had compassed it. The thought was terrible, and chased away the cherished hope of one day—by this very means—inducing Harcourt to give up his wrong-doing and redeem the past. For months she had seen compunction and distress in her hus-

band's face. His conscience, she believed, was not yet dead, and if the power were given to him he would gladly retrieve himself. She saw he was wretched, ground down by abject fear of Mr. Trapps, and driven to desperation, intemperance, and dissipation in order to drown thought. Gertrude even yet loved her husband, and after all his cruelty and indifference, still remained his guardian angel, ready to seek and to save him from going farther astray. She was still uncertain what plan to pursue. A great, a terrible responsibility was upon her, and Gertrude felt overwhelmed with the thought—shattered from head to foot.

"Oh! why, why is my vision fixed alone on earthly, grovelling things? Why cannot I seek that aid, that teaching, which alone can keep me right? Oh, my God! my heart is far from Thee! teach me —teach me how to pray and what to do! Oh, let me not give place to that spirit of revenge which once held me captive! No, no; I forgive all—all! Oh my Father! Thou knowest my heart; let me not deceive myself!" Gertrude half thought and prayed. Then she sank upon her knees, and prayed long and fervently; not for herself alone, but for Harcourt, Mrs. Glenmore, and all. Truly, affliction was working out salutary effects in her thoughts and feelings! The flaws in that noble nature were being corrected, until eventually its beauty and devotedness should shine forth with undimmed radiance. Gertrude arose from her knees with one firm, settled resolve —to forgive all, to try to make peace with Harcourt, and to tell him every circumstance connected

with the Will, and to induce him by every persuasion in her power to give up Abbots Thorpe to its rightful heir.

All this thought, this anxiety, might have been spared. Nemesis had long been at work, and now was close upon the Glenmore heel. Another and far mightier agent was about to do the work of retributive justice.

Gertrude lay down upon the couch in her dressing-room. She could not sleep, but remained with her eyes riveted on the fire. At last her hands fell motionless, and her eyes were half closed by a dreamy stupor which she felt reluctant to break. One, two, three, four, five, the great clock told out, and then the sound died quivering slowly away.

"What—what can that be?" thought Gertrude, as, aroused by the sound of the clock, she perceived a lurid light through the farthest window. She arose quickly, drew back the blind, and perceived a strange gleam lighting the avenue. In an instant she was aroused to action. The next, perceiving the flame issued from the house, she was in the gallery calling loudly "Fire! fire!" Her first thought was for Harcourt. "Good heavens! are they all asleep, suffocated in their beds?" She pushed open door after door, but no flames issued from them, although a cloud of smoke rolled up—up from she knew not where. It was evident the fire was in the lower part of the house, and in Mrs. Glenmore and Harcourt's wing, which was the opposite one to that occupied by herself. By this time the gallery was full of screaming maids and staring men, shouting for water, but

all intent upon saving themselves, and proposing the wildest measures in order to effect that purpose. "Ring the alarm bell!" called Gertrude. "You have not the spirit of men, or you would try to save your master and Mrs. Glenmore. Do you not see *we* are comparatively safe, and that it is from Mrs. Glenmore's wing that the flames issue?"

No one volunteered, and Gertrude in an agony perceived the flames were spreading rapidly. Suddenly she remembered the Will. Quick as thought she was back to her own room, and hurriedly securing the precious document within her dress, again appeared among the affrighted domestics. By this time the galleries and staircase were crowded with the visitors and servants.

Harry Verner rushed up the passage half dressed, in hot haste to save Gertrude. "The bell! Harry—the bell! Never mind me, ring the bell for Heaven's sake! Harcourt—Mrs. Glenmore! Will no one save them?" groaned Gertrude as she perceived that both visitors and servants had tied sheets together, and were letting themselves down through the windows as fast as possible.

"Do, do come, Mrs. Harcourt," they all exclaimed. "You will be burnt to death—see, the flames have even now reached this wing; there is no communication with the lower part of the house—for Heaven's sake come! Come, or we shall be roasted alive!"

"No, never! See—see, the village is now awake, help will soon be here! Oh! Harcourt! Harcourt!" shrieked Gertrude as she dashed past them down

the long gallery and through the thick smoke at the other end. At last she gained Mrs. Glenmore's door; it was the first on that landing. The floor there was so hot it almost burnt her feet. In vain she knocked, and tried to force it open. It was fastened with a drop bolt inside, and Gertrude in intense agony, and nearly suffocated with the smoke, knew from the flame which she perceived through the chinks of the door, that the fire was raging furiously within. On—on she groped to Harcourt's room. Fortunately the door was not locked. The apartment was full of smoke, and he slept soundly in a sort of stupor. Gertrude called, shouted, and shook him, but in vain, she could not arouse him from sleep. Superhuman strength seemed hers. She pulled him off the bed and on to the floor, dragging him out of the room and through the increasing smoke along the gallery to a place of present safety. Once out of the smoke the stupor left him, and he awoke. Instinctively he seemed to understand how matters were, and would have rushed back to his mother's room had not Gertrude held him fast within her arms.

"Harcourt! Harcourt! Oh! my husband!" she cried, kissing him wildly, and clinging to him.

"Confound you! what do you mean by all this humbug? Where is my mother—and—and Cecilia Rookes? Are they to be roasted alive whilst you are playing the loving fool? Let me go—will you, dare you hold me, madam?" But Gertrude held him with marvellous strength.

"I implore you not to go, Harcourt! Harcourt,

for mercy's sake stay!" she shrieked, as he angrily freed himself from her grasp, and ran back to his mother's room. In vain! The flames were spreading, surmounting everything.

Shouts, cries, and distracted screams filled the air. People calling to them from the outside to come out by this balcony and that window, for Heaven's sake, and to think only of saving themselves; a precaution which Gertrude discovered had been very generally adopted by visitors and domestics, for she was there alone.

There had been a great want of water, and only one fire-engine on the spot, which was now playing vigorously upon the burning wing. The crowds of villagers stood gaping and staring around, but made not a single effort to save the Glenmore property.

"Let it burn, let it burn!—who cares?" was the constant exclamation. "These Glenmores are a bad lot; it is a judgment upon them; they have no right to Abbots Thorpe; it is young Master Hugh's, and they know it, and that rascal Mr. Trapps knows it." Then a cry arose for Mr. Trapps, which Thomas Rymer and others answered with a curious smile, as they replied, "In there! in there among the flames, having a foretaste of the burning lake! and, lads, which of you would stretch out a hand to help him out?"

A fierce mocking laugh from the motley crowd was the only reply. Gertrude, exhausted and miserable, made no effort to save herself, but gazed upon the curling smoke and raging flames with an awestruck face. Oh, the rushing, roaring sound!

the thunder of falling timbers! the heat! the glow! and the hissing, boiling water contending with its opposing element! In another moment she would have been in flames; the fire had rushed upwards out of the smoke uncontrolled, and bathed everything far and near in its lurid blaze. Stupor had already numbed her limbs, and in another instant Gertrude would have perished, had not a tall, stalwart figure leaped through the window behind her, and seizing her in his arms, descended to the lawn beneath.

There was a wild shout and cheer for Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, the heir of Abbots Thorpe, when he appeared with his burthen; but Gertrude was unconscious of it.

They laid her upon the grass, restoratives were administered, and in a short time she partially recovered.

The cry still arose for Harcourt, Mrs. Glenmore, and Mr. Trapps, but no one seemed inclined to risk their own lives, in order to save them. Crash! crash! The very earth shook!

Harry Verner was safe, but much burnt in his search for Gertrude whilst she was in her husband's room. He forgot his own pain in joy at her safety, and was now chafing her cold hands with brotherly tenderness.

"Oh, Harry! will no one try to save my husband and Mrs. Glenmore? Great Heaven! they may even now be burnt to death! Harcourt broke from me to save his mother, and perhaps he is even now dead—dead!"

Gertrude could not weep, but uttered these words in a tone of blank horror.

Hugh approached her; his face was pale, and his firm lip quivered for an instant; the next, a bright smile illumined his features as he replied—

"Yes, Mrs. Harcourt, if your husband and Mrs. Glenmore can be saved, I am ready to attempt it. I will do my utmost."

His dark, manly form disappeared in a moment. There was an intense hush and lull among the people, as if they held their breath in horror, believing it to be certain death to enter that raging furnace. But no, no! thanks! thanks! it is not! Hugh is there in safety! his noble figure stands out like a giant's in the red glare, as he appears at the window, bearing some stiff, stark object upon his back. Cheers rend the air, and a hundred hands are stretched forth in hearty congratulations, after the perils he has escaped; but Hugh was faint and sick with the horrors he had seen, and could make no reply.

After Harcourt left Gertrude, he hurried to his mother's room, and found the door so burnt and heated he had no difficulty in breaking through it. The flame and smoke, however, drove him back, and he lay, fearfully burnt, in the middle of the passage, which he had just managed to reach before falling into a state of insensibility.

It was utterly impossible to save even the remains of Mrs. Glenmore. No, they must mingle, until the Great Day, with the ruins of Abbots Thorpe.

Harcourt was frightfully burnt. Meta Raycliffe

was there. When she perceived the flames issuing from the windows of Abbots Thorpe she summoned Matthew Fielding, and made her way to the scene of destruction, bent upon offering her house and help to the sufferers.

When Gertrude perceived Harcourt in the arms of Hugh, she swooned away. Meta and Harry Verner had her conveyed to the farm. Where then should Harcourt be taken? No one seemed anxious to undertake the care of him, and no one volunteered the use of house or service in his favour except Meta, so to Ashlee he also was carried, the doctor following his litter in order to dress his wounds. He was quite insensible. The hair came off in masses, eyelashes and eyebrows were gone, and his face, neck, and arms were frightfully reddened and blistered. There appeared very little chance of his recovery, and Meta was so anxious about Gertrude, who had again fallen into a deep swoon, that she called in further medical aid.

Meta tended Gertrude with sisterly care. Whilst unfastening her dress, the Will of old Squire Ethelstone revealed itself to her astonished gaze.

Mr. Trapps could not be found. It was, however, proved beyond doubt that the conflagration was the work of an incendiary; therefore the fire at Abbots Thorpe, and his subsequent flight, were cause and effect. Abbots Thorpe,

> "This house of splendour and of princely glory,
> Doth now stand desolated,"

with scarcely a vestige of itself remaining. And few there are to mourn its fate. Not even Hugh, who,

whilst he weeps for the home of his ancestors, erects in imagination a fairer, a holier home, built upon the proceeds of honest industry, in the place of mighty Abbots Thorpe—the sacrilegious gift of a king, and an inheritance of woe to generations of Ethelstones!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE day after a calamity! Who does not know what that is? The morning dawned in all its freshness and beauty upon that scene of desolation and misery, as if no disaster had ever come near it. Those who were saved felt like rescued mariners after a shipwreck, and shook hands again and again, with renewed thrills of thankfulness.

Gertrude after her swoon had fallen into deep sleep, and rested tranquilly, with her sorrows hushed for a time. Harcourt was still in a state of stupefaction, and was under the care of two medical men, who had dressed the burns, and now waited with anxious countenances lest fever or erysipelas should supervene. Hugh was there also, and helped Meta in her many arrangements for the comfort of the invalids. This was their first meeting since Hugh's visit to Abbots Thorpe; and their time and thoughts were now too wholly absorbed even to allude to the mysterious circumstances connected with the fire. Gertrude, with the old squire's Will in her possession, had become a problem of difficulty to Meta, and she did not know what step to pursue. Should she leave the Will in her possession, and when she

awoke charge her with the fact of having it? Or should she at once place it in Hugh's hands? She decided upon the former plan, and put the precious document beneath Gertrude's pillow, not daring to leave her bed-side lest it should be removed.

In two hours Gertrude awoke with a deep sigh. She rose in bed and looked wildly around her. "Where, where am I? Harcourt, Harcourt, Mrs. Glenmore! Oh heavens! burnt, burnt—dead!" A paroxysm of tears came to her relief. Meta slipped behind the curtain and left her to weep unseen. "Oh, Harcourt, Harcourt, my husband! gone, gone!" uttered Gertrude, in heart-rendering tones, as she turned upon her pillow to hide her face, and to stifle the groans that were wrung from her in the extremity of her anguish. Her husband dead—gone. All the old passionate ardour of her first love had returned, and her very soul seemed steeped in woe as she realised the thought that up to the last moment of his life Harcourt had been engaged in reckless, selfish courses,—snatched from dissipation, and levity, to meet his God. "Oh! if he had only had space or power to repent and make reparation to the heir of Abbots Thorpe," groaned Gertrude, in anguish beyond the power of words. She could not lie still, but arose from the bed and sank on the floor, crouching to the ground in overwhelming misery. "Oh! if I could only pray for him; but he is gone beyond the power of prayer. And I—I, perhaps, led him farther away from right by my own cold and unforgiving heart. His blood may be on my head; for oh! dreadful thought! his hatred

of me may have ruined him, and I have slain his soul!"

"Forgive me, Mrs. Harcourt," said Meta, emerging from the other side of the bed, and advancing to Gertrude with a gentle smile. "I have heard all. Ah! well I know how much you suffer; but I bring you comfort. There—rise, rise from your knees. God has heard your prayers, and with Him there is infinite mercy and redemption. 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'—those blessed words may yet be heard by your husband, who is still alive, and in an adjoining room; but very, very ill."

"Oh, God be thanked!" prayed Gertrude, with the hot tears streaming down her woeful face. "Oh! Miss Raycliffe, if he can but have space for repentance, I can give him the means of reparation. See—see, I have the old squire's last Will in my possession. I discovered the secret, and stole it from Mr. Trapps. Another time, not now, I will tell you all. Only it is here safe—safe. But what shall I do with it? I fear to lose it out of my sight, and long to put it in a place of safety until Harcourt can give it with his own hands to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone."

"It will be some time before he can do that, dear Mrs. Harcourt, for he is very ill. But do not agitate yourself. Here is a private cabinet containing a secret drawer, where it will be perfectly safe; would you like to put it there?"

"May I place it in your care, dear Miss Raycliffe? With you I know it will be safe."

"You may," replied Meta, with a radiant smile, "and I will guard it as the greatest earthly treasure I possess."

"It will only be for a few days. The rightful heir must be acknowledged as soon as possible," said Gertrude.

"He ought to be," replied Meta, with a touch of the Raycliffe sternness; "he has been too long defrauded of his rights to delay such an act of justice."

Five days passed, and no material change had taken place in Harcourt's condition. He was still in imminent danger, and suffering excruciating pain. He was conscious, however, and seemed to recognise his wife, Meta, and Hugh Atheling Ethelstone—the latter always with a shudder. Gertrude would have given much to know what was passing in that sleepless mind, for Harcourt never closed his eyes, and it was painfully evident that he was anxious, wretched, and hopeless.

Gertrude watched and nursed him constantly, comprehending his every wish by instinct, and doing more to relieve and sustain him in his trial than any one else. At first he was pettish and unkind to her, even refusing to take the food from her hand, and preferred to have Meta at his side. His constant cry was for his mother and Cecilia Rookes, and Meta's heart often ached for his poor wife, who, although wretchedly weak and worn, endured his unkindness meekly, and tended him with comforting words and refreshing smiles.

At last Harcourt was sufficiently recovered to talk.

The burns were healing, but he was frightfully disfigured. As he grew better Hugh discontinued his visits, and now merely sent each day to inquire.

Though so much better, it was quite evident to the doctors and Meta that Harcourt Glenmore's system had received a shock from which it would never recover, and that his days were numbered. The anxious thought constantly recurred, "How and when shall we break this to his wife?"

One day Gertrude was alone with Harcourt. He reclined in an easy chair close to the window, through which he gazed wistfully in the direction of Abbots Thorpe. Gertrude looked at him with loving anxious eyes, and her heart beat with pleasure as she perceived two large tears stealing down his cheeks. She did not dare to notice them, but quietly pursued her work, with an inward prayer that they might be tears of penitence.

"Gertrude, Gertrude," he uttered, in a low, nervous tone, "come here."

She arose with a beating heart, and, drawing a stool to his side, sat down at his feet, looking up to him with her large sunken eyes.

"Nearer," he murmured.

For a moment silence ensued. Each might hear the heart of the other beat as the long-sundered husband and wife gazed upon eaeh other with earnest, trustful eyes.

"Gertrude, can you, will you forgive me?" said Harcourt, with an effort which caused his face to fade into marble whiteness. "I—I deserve your hatred, Gertrude, but instead you have given me a

life-long devotion. Oh, Gerty! I have been as a deadly upas, blighting your happiness. Oh! I dare not hope! You cannot know what I suffer, Gerty, or you would pity and forgive. I have indeed thrown away the brightest jewel of my life, even your love! I see it now when it is too late!"

"Hated you, Harcourt? No, never! Not for an hour or a moment. I love you, I have always loved you; but—but——"

"Yes! I know what that 'but' means, Gerty! Oh! fool, madman that I have been! my eyes are opened too late—too late! I know I shall die, Gerty, and then? The doctors have told me I cannot recover, and that my days are numbered—a week, perhaps—nay, a month at the most."

"Harcourt—Harcourt!"

"Ah, well! why should I wish to live with this horrible face? When a fellow is too ugly to look at, it is best for him to die. Cecilia Rookes, I should like to see her—to warn her, Gerty, and to tell her that every particle of love is gone from her for ever; that she—she has been my bane, my blight, *my* upas-tree, poisoning my life here and hereafter! I hate her as I once hated you. Oh, Gerty! if you had only loved and appreciated my mother, all might have been well with us."

Gertrude turned deadly pale, and shrank from her husband with a shudder. He observed the movement with a sad smile, but made no remark. Gertrude was too noble and self-renunciating to explain the good cause she had for her dislike of Mrs. Glenmore.

"Gerty, I have an awful deed upon my conscience! —the old squire's Will! You—you do not know that I have no right to Abbots Thorpe; that—that Trapps stole the last Will, and—and I knew it, but had not the moral courage to face the difficulty, and restore it to its rightful owner. On my honour, I did not know this until twelve months after I came into possession; then that rascal, Trapps, told me, with many threats, such was the fact. I used to give him hundreds, and then thousands, to keep the secret. He nearly ruined me, and drove me to desperation. Oh, Gerty! would that I had never been born! But I must see Hugh! At first I could not endure to look upon him—now everything is changed, and I feel as though I must make reparation. Your fortune too, Gerty! Do you know it is nearly all gone? When I die you will only have a few hundreds a year to live upon: I received a statement from Jones, Twigg, and Son, and such, Gerty, is the fact. Oh! you cannot grieve for such a wretch as I! Poor, poor girl!" he added affectionately, stroking her dark hair as she leaned her head against his knee and wept.

"Dear Harcourt, I do not weep for my lost fortune, but for your unhappiness. But all this sorrow may yet turn into a blessing. Trials and afflictions are sent to purify us, and make us fit for the kingdom of Heaven. Do you remember the verse we had in the little hymn at church?—

> 'Did ever sinner plead with Thee,
> And Thou reject his lowly plea?
> Does not Thy word still pledged remain,
> That none shall seek Thy face in vain?'"

"No, I don't remember it," he replied, despondingly. "I cannot remember anything I ever heard in church—people never listen there."

"Oh, Harcourt, don't say so! But you will let me read to you on Sunday out of the Prayer Book? We will say our prayers together."

Harcourt bit his lip, and Gertrude saw he was terribly unhappy; but he made no reply. Truly he was reaping the fruit of sin! The bitterness of Cain filled his breast as he remembered that he had not prayed for years—not since he was a little child, and said every day "Our Father" at his nurse's knee. Who can tell what change came into the heart of fashionable, frivolous, dissipated Harcourt Glenmore, as he realised, with a groan, that he could not pray, and that he must die soon? Anguish—anguish and remorse flowed into his heart, and he vowed that if it would please God to restore him to health, he would try to do his duty, and be a better man. But no! the fiat had gone forth, and Harcourt Glenmore had but a few short weeks in which to redeem the past!

Gradually Gertrude unfolded every circumstance connected with the finding of the Will. They were now united hand and heart, and could mutually confide every thought and feeling. Each day Harcourt's strength failed more and more. Gertrude saw it, but still those were happy days for her to look back upon, as their present union was an unlooked-for blessing, although only a resting-point before a period of trial and earthly separation. Every now and then Harcourt had fearful fits of

despondency. During them, neither Gertrude nor Meta attempted with false kindness to talk away his low spirits, but left repentance to do its purifying work.

"Gertrude, I must restore the Will to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone to-day," said Harcourt, as he leaned heavily upon her shoulder, in order to reach the easy chair near the window. He would get out of bed each day, though so terribly wasted, so thin, so weak, and so disfigured, with his poor face all seams and frightful scars.

"Well, dear Harcourt, if you wish it," she replied, looking tenderly into his eyes.

"Will he come? Can I see him here? Bring me the Will, Gerty, and call Miss Raycliffe. What an angel she is!—two angels, you and she! Oh, Gerty, Gerty!"

Before the close of that day, Hugh had the Will in his possession, and he had forgiven all the injury done to him by Harcourt Glenmore.

"Forgive you, my dear fellow? yes, from my heart!" he had uttered, in tones of deep emotion, as, overwhelmed with shame, Harcourt pleaded for forgiveness. "I am rich, prosperous, well, thanks be to God!—and you are in affliction. Would that I could restore you to happiness and health! But it may not be. Let us, as men, lift up our voices and say, 'Thy will be done!' Life, Harcourt, is very short to us all, and if you go now, I follow soon. Faith, repentance, and prayer are a man's best physicians on a sick bed."

"Hugh, you speak like one who knows the way to

heaven. I—I feel all dark—dark here. I want light. Where—where shall I find it?"

"In the Saviour, Harcourt. Seek Him!"

"Hugh, I have taken a wrong path in life! Circumstances have led me wrong—but that is a coward's defence—no, no; all blame rests with myself, and I have thrown every blessing wilfully on one side, in order to indulge the headstrong passions of my slavish nature."

Harcourt fell back exhausted. Hugh called Gertrude and Meta, and then departed with a heavy heart. He knew Harcourt's hours were numbered, and that they were ebbing fast.

Poor fellow! he passed an awful night, full of restlessness and tossings. Towards morning he slept. Gertrude and Meta—sisters in heart and feeling, for they had learnt to love each other sincerely—knelt by his bedside, and prayed for the dying man.

"Oh, Meta! if he would only be persuaded to see Mr. Leslie, and receive the Sacrament," said Gertrude. "He is dying! Don't you see death written in his face?"

At this moment he opened his dim eyes.

"Gerty, Gerty! bless you, my wife! You have forgiven all; will God forgive me? Meta Raycliffe—good, kind Meta Raycliffe will help you, Gerty. And Hugh, bless him! he is a noble fellow, and will see to everything. Don't trust Jones, Twigg, and Son. They have the box containing deeds and papers of great consequence to you. But Hugh has promised to manage everything. He is left executor."

"Dearest, do not trouble yourself with these things—all will be well with regard to that. Think only of higher and holier things."

Gertrude was on the bed, supporting her husband's dying frame, and watching his half-closed eyes. She was pale as death; the dark lines under her eyes, and the eager straining look of her expressive face denoting how much she suffered. There was profound stillness in the house, and only Meta in the room, kneeling at Harcourt's bedside, trying to warm the cold, unanswering hand which lay upon the coverlet. But Gertrude only felt with sickening dread that the end was drawing near. Harcourt, the husband of her youth, whom she had loved so truly, was dying—going far, far away out of her reach now, when they might have been so happy, and he all she had ever wished him to be—pure and good.

Oh, that for one single moment she might satisfy the deep, forgiving, pitying love of her soul by one more answering look of affection—one word of tenderness from her dying husband! The hours sped unmeasured by Gertrude or Meta. They were too absorbed to note the time, and when the nurse entered the room in the early blue morning light, they were surprised to find it day. The blinds were drawn up, and the new light thrown upon Harcourt's face revealed too truly how busy the hand of death had been during the last few hours, and deprived Gertrude of every lingering hope within her breast. Later in the morning he grew worse, and called for Hugh and Mr. Leslie. They both came. At noon

he received the Sacrament, and sank into a quiet sleep. The power of speech had gone for ever! No more prayers, no more suing for pardon from Harcourt Glenmore, but only the fruition in eternity of the works done in the body. But peace stole over his face as he slept, and comforted his poor wife. She bent over him to give one parting kiss, and as she bent the thick veil dropped which shuts out Time and launches the soul upon the shores of Eternity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It soon became known that the old squire's last Will had been discovered, and that Hugh Atheling Ethelstone was no longer an alien from the ancient home of his fathers, but the lawful possessor of those noble lands and the Squire of Abbots Thorpe. Rumour, with her thousand tongues, was rife; but Hugh entered into no explanation, except to say that Harcourt Glenmore having discovered accidentally that Mr. Trapps possessed a Will in his favour, immediately relinquished his claim to the property, and placed the long missing Will in the hands of Hugh's lawyers. Not a word more would he say. Thomas Rymer and Nancy held a village council daily in their garden and best parlour to discuss the strange events of the last few months, and speculate upon Harcourt's recovery and beggary, and to surmise every variety of wild fancy concerning Mr. Trapps, whose remains had not been found by the workmen engaged in clearing away the *débris* from the ruins of the once magnificent mansion. The general opinion now was, that having to give up the Will, and knowing that retribution was close upon him, he had, with Satanic malice, fired the noble house of the Ethelstones, and then escaped,

carrying away as many valuables and as much money as he could lay his hand upon. The police were on the alert throughout the length and breadth of the land. Brownlow Rigg and his subordinate still held awful sway over the simple-minded village folk, remaining at the "Red Lion" to prosecute further inquiries. But to no purpose. Trapps had gone, and could not be found, although government placarded a large reward for his apprehension, and Hugh offered a further sum to the discoverer of his hiding-place. Immediately after the fire the Rookeses left Holmlee for the Continent. In a few days the furniture was removed, and the property was on sale.

Poor Meta! how her eyes filled with tears when she read the advertisement, and wondered who were to be the next possesssors of the old place she loved so well! "Oh, that I could purchase it!" was her first thought. "But that cannot be. If they had only remained a few years longer I might perhaps, for my farm prospers wonderfully." She realised, however, the utter hopelessness of buying, so wisely tried to think as little about it as possible.

Hugh was anxious there should be no public demonstration upon his return to Abbots Thorpe, until after Harcourt's death, which appeared inevitable. But he could not influence the feelings or rule the actions of his people in this matter. What cared they for Harcourt Glenmore? Nay, if their shouts of welcome to the restored heir could have reached his ears in the stillness of his sick room, they would have been all the better pleased, and

shouted louder. Men are not perfect heroes of virtue, any more than they are complete monsters of vice. Human excellence is not usually very high or very low. Shakspeare, I fancy, thoroughly understood this, for he never drew a villain without some redeeming point, or a good man without some failing.

Perhaps Hugh placed poor human nature in too flattering a point of view when he asked them to reserve their cheers out of consideration to Harcourt's feelings. For a few days enthusiasm smouldered, but that was all. Then rejoicing of every kind took place, and Hugh, finding it was useless to stem the tide of popularity which had set in, gracefully yielded to it, and proved himself, not only by gifts and promises, but by word and deed, the noble-hearted fellow he truly was. Again and again hearty cheers broke forth, and, as he spoke to them from the balcony of the "Red Lion," tearful, loving eyes met his—hearty, homely, and sincere. There was no self-exaltation in what Hugh said; no vanity and self-seeking; no faint-hearted pandering to the tastes and feelings of an illiterate audience, to whom he was the idol of the hour; no cloudy rhetoric of a mere parliamentary sophist, courting the suffrage of the people, showing symptoms of a weak will, ready to yield to popular caprice; on the contrary, earnest thought and sound judgment, matured by contact with the world, gave point, power, and tone to all he said. They loved and admired Hugh before he spoke; when he finished they had learnt to respect his opinion also.

"Why, he'll be t' greatest man of his day," was the general exclamation. "Who'd ever a thought that an Ethelstone would have had so much sense and 'go' in him! Hurrah! hurrah! three times three cheers for t' rightful, lawful heir of Abbots Thorpe. The good time is coming, lads; and a good landlord, who knows what poor folks is made of, and will help to make Abbots Thorpe a seaport town full of big ships like Liverpool, is Hugh Atheling Ethelstone! Hurrah! Down with Ethelstone's enemies, and up with his friends! Hurrah! hurrah! he shall be returned to Parliament, and be t' Prime Minister before he die! Hurrah! Ethelstone for ever, and groans for them as kept him out of his rights!"

Hugh made his escape from the noisy scene, and returned to his home, glad to seek refuge in the snug little parlour of the Misses Southwood, the daughters of the late rector of Abbots Thorpe, who had offered their furnished house to him after the fire, which he gladly accepted, and for which he paid an exorbitant rent, thereby enabling the three maiden ladies to look up their many former friends in Leamington and elsewhere. It was mutual accommodation; and after all that is the best, because it leaves no sting of obligation on either side. To receive favours well, requires some amount of amiability. Surely it is more blessed to give than to receive; few there are who have not experienced that fact.

The funeral was over! Harcourt Glenmore lay in Abbots Thorpe churchyard, very close to Hugh Atheling Ethelstone's gentle wife. Gertrude followed

him to his last home, supported by Meta, Hugh, and Harry Verner. Mr. Ellerton read the service; Gertrude wished it, and had sent for him in her deep affliction. The Glenmores were hated at Abbots Thorpe, but there was not a dry eye there among the villagers and others, congregated to see Harcourt buried, as they looked upon his lovely widow, in her deep weeds, bowed down to the very dust in humble prayer and abject grief. Every man stood uncovered in silent heartfelt sympathy, as Hugh supported the faint and weeping Gertrude to the carriage which waited to convey her, desolate and homeless, to Meta's sheltering roof. After the mourning carriages had rolled away, men and women turned again, with hard and unmoved faces, to look into Harcourt's newly-made grave, to speculate upon his life, his death, and his misdeeds, in coarse and grating tones, breaking the solemn silence which reigned around. Every one had seen and pitied the sorrowful face covered with the deep crape veil; but now, such is human nature, they began to marvel at her grief, and wonder how it could be, "for surely she could have no better fortune than to lose a bad husband." *They* only looked upon it as a deliverance, and the women hinted Gertrude's grief was all a sham. Thomas and Nancy Rymer, however, valiantly stood up for her, and bravely opposed Lucy Knowles when she declared it as her belief that Mrs. Harcourt Glenmore "made a grand palaver, all for show, because she didn't care a fig in reality, but wanted folk to think as she cared a great deal. Why she looked as 'wee-woe' as if he'd been t' best husband in t' world

instead of t' worst," she concluded wheezily, for Lucy was troubled with an asthma which added nothing to her amiability.

All this time the weeping lonely widow was struggling bravely against her sorrow, praying that she might not be as one without hope. Meta's heart yearned towards her in pity. Truly the tendrils of her affectionate nature had twined themselves around the disconsolate Gertrude with a loving clasp, to inspire hope, trust, and faith in that heart, which had often, in bitter thought, imagined every man's hand raised against her; but who now, in Meta Raycliffe, had found the precious jewel of sincere friendship and sisterly love.

* * * * * *

The firm of Miles Gorton and Co. prospered more and more. In the city, and among commercial men, the dingy premises, No. 108, Simkin's Lane, are a bright, a glorious, and a coveted El Dorado. Miles Gorton was seldom there, for since his daughter's death he had entered still more into public and parliamentary life. Hugh was the active managing partner, and under his skilful sway the already immense business and profits of the firm, as well as its high position, had increased considerably. Their paper was good for incredible sums, their credit almost boundless! Envious city gossip had long suggested their retirement from the arena of trade; but Miles Gorton and his nephew had far different motives for continuing the prosperous business than those so charitably imputed to them by the world. Miles Gorton's pet scheme of philanthropy just

then would have surprised, yes, and amused some of those hard-headed individuals who are constantly jingling the money in their own pockets whilst they declares their neighbour has enough, and ought not to wish to make more. Ah! how easy it is to judge our brother! This pet scheme was no other than the purchase of Holmlee, to be held for little Reggy Raycliffe, until he, like Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, had entered the firm of Miles Gorton and Co., and by his own industry had realised sufficient money to re-purchase the old estate and home of his fathers. Mr. Gorton was in frequent communication with Ellinor, and had already hinted his scheme, which she approved with many expressions of gratitude, at the same time timidly intimating that she feared her husband's dislike to trade would be an obstacle to the kind intention. When Miles read that part of the letter his eyes flashed indignantly, and he called Hugh to hear him give expression to sundry remarks more severe than complimentary to Reginald. "What! the old thing over again," he remarked. "Has he not grown wiser yet? Ever neglecting substantial good for the weak stray straws of his own high-flown imagination. Poor Ellinor—poor Ellinor! I pity her, and I think her husband a fool. He will make a fool, too, of poor little Reggy, unless that practical, sensible aunt of his educates him into common sense before his father returns to England."

"Miss Raycliffe brings him up well," replied Hugh warmly. "Depend upon it, the little Reginald will live to restore Holmlee, and to be all that you, my dear sir, wish our dear Marian's godson to be."

"I trust so—he is a dear little fellow, and I love him almost as much as our little pet, Marian. Don't think I am getting into my dotage, Hugh; but when I see those two children playing together, I dream of a day, not so far distant, when I may see them united for life, and the Raycliffe and Ethelstone feud for ever buried in oblivion. What say you, Hugh?"

Hugh could say nothing. He could only blush scarlet as he thought of a much more expditious method of ending the ancient feud of the two families.

Mr. Gorton saw the flush, and Hugh's embarrassment. He was pleased to see it, too, for in the kindly warmth of his honest heart he was now constantly planning how he could bring Hugh and Meta together. He repeatedly urged him to marry; spoke of it as a duty which he owed his child, but like an old soldier in love's tactics, never once alluded to Meta as a wife, though he constantly affirmed if he were twenty years younger he should not hesitate to enter the lists, and break a lance with old or young in the cause of Meta Raycliffe. And all this time Hugh was far, very far from being indifferent to Meta. He loved her, not as he had once done "when in the spring of life a young man's fancy lightly turns to love," but with the matured feelings of later days. The old love had returned, deepened, strengthened; but he struggled against it, and would not for Marian's sake allow it to take possession of his breast. He was free—free to love Meta Raycliffe, yet he shrank from the thought as if it were unholy.

Meta saw it too, and avoided him as much as possible, neither encouraging his visits to the farm, nor seeming to take much interest in his concerns. The Raycliffe spirit had been touched, and when they met, Meta's manner became so haughty and distant he wondered when and how he had offended her.

Three months have elapsed since the fire at Abbots Thorpe, and excitement has given place to speculation and joy. Every one seems happy and exultant, except poor Gertrude, who has been very ill, and now sits in Meta's sunniest room, face to face with her misery.

It is the end of August. The landscape is rich in yellow corn-fields, and meadows lie like emeralds, dotting here and there, bright in after-grass. But Gertrude joys not in the azure sky or the ripened grain; and sits at the window listless, world-worn, with but one want, "rest," lying at her heart.

The fruit of that teeming land was Meta's; the prosperity of that busy farm-yard, Meta's; and those picturesque wains full of ripened grain, winding up the hill in rosy sunlight, Meta's; and Meta was there in the midst, an inspiration—for her approving smile and gentle words gave encouragement to all. Yet even she was not happy. She often asked herself why she had outgrown the joyous freshness of her youthful days, and felt so old? If a bitter feeling of indignation against Hugh arose in her breast because he had marred her happiness, need we wonder? "But what is he to me now? He never loved me, that is evident, and yet I have no other thought but for him. This must not, shall not be. No, even if he

said to me, 'Meta, I love you,' I think I should reply, 'Hugh, I hate you.'" Then Meta remembered how the Raycliffe pride had ever been a besetting sin in her family, planted grim and strong, to scare them from the paths of peace and love. "Would that I could uproot the pernicious weed!" thought Meta, as she stooped to caress a cherub boy, rolled in the grass by the little sister who had charge of him. When she raised her head it was to meet the manly eyes of Hugh fixed upon her with an expression which sent the hot blood whelming to her brow.

"Ah! Mr. Ethelstone" (Meta never called him Hugh now), "is that you? Have you walked in this broiling sun to admire my crops? Are they not glorious? I feel in love with all mankind to-day; our harvest-home will be joyous this year; we intend to make it a jubilee. Poor Gertrude! her sorrow is now my only trouble."

"Poor creature! she has indeed suffered," replied Hugh, feelingly. "Harcourt might have been the best husband in creation instead of the worst. Women are strange compounds!"

"Do you think so?" said Meta. "I have had so little experience in either men or women, I cannot speak except from individual feeling, and that feeling would lead me to say that if I possessed a husband who compared women to spaniels, I should hate him."

An angry flush was upon her brow, and the Raycliffe curve of pride upon her lip. Hugh saw it, and marvelled to think how much changed she was during the last few months.

"Meta—Miss Raycliffe, I did not seek you to-day to annoy you or wound your feelings; if I have done so, pardon me! I did not mean to offend, but to consult you, and tell you how my affairs progress."

"Subjects I am always interested in," replied Meta, "not so much on your account as for the great principles they involve."

What feeling made Meta forget all her kindness then? She thought she had not a spark of it in her heart at that moment. Quite a mistake, Meta!

Hugh bit his lip, and felt inclined to resent her unkindness. Meta walked on with a firm step, and thought, "Yes, he can come to me to talk of his own prosperity—his own affairs—his own feelings—but he never, never thinks of mine." Meta was angry, consequently unjust.

They continued silent for some time, Hugh more vehemently than gracefully switching off the heads of fox-gloves and poppies with his riding-whip.

"Has Trapps's hiding-place been discovered?" at length asked Meta.

"No, not yet. The detective, Brownlow Rigg, is still here, but he has not yet succeeded in finding the rascal's whereabouts. They seem quite certain he is still in this neighbourhood. There is a government reward, as well as my own, offered for his capture. It seems he was seriously implicated in some fearful murder abroad, the particulars of which have recently come to light. The Bankses, mother and daughter, I suppose you know, are both transported for fourteen years."

"Yes, I read it in the paper; but the less we say

about the details of that trial, the better, I imagine, for poor Gertrude's sake. The disgraceful revelations respecting the Glenmore family seem to distress her dreadfully."

"Why should they? She was not concerned in them, and every one pities her, and loves her too. She has indeed borne affliction well; come out of adversity in the glorious apparel of a noble Christian woman," remarked Hugh, warmly.

"So she has, but nevertheless she feels the disgrace deeply."

"Poor creature, I pity her, and shall do all in my power, Meta, to help you to alleviate her sorrow. But I came to tell you good news. Old Rookes has at last consented to sell Holmlee to my uncle, Miles Gorton; the purchase is all but completed, and in less than a month it will be held by him for dear little Reggy, who is there on his pony coming down the hill to meet you."

"Oh, Hugh!" (Meta forgot to call him Mr. Ethelstone) "how good, how kind! can I ever repay such a disinterested act? The dream of my life is about to be realised, and Holmlee will again be a Raycliffe's!"

The old familiar tone in which Meta uttered "Hugh" sent a thrill of pleasure through his frame. Such things, however trivial, reach the heart, and Hugh felt happier after he had heard it.

Reggy had caught sight of his aunt and Hugh, and fearlessly galloped towards them erect in his saddle, his chesnut curls blown back, and his dark violet eyes beaming with delight.

"Glorious little fellow!" said Hugh, as he galloped up. "How well he rides, and how he is grown! Well done, little Reggy, you'll be a man in no time."

"That he will!" replied Meta, her whole heart gushing out in love to the boy. "Oh! how I wish Reginald and Ellinor could see him, just as he looks now," she added proudly, as the little fellow, with a whoop of pleasure, which his pony seemed quite to understand, started off again at full gallop.

"My little Marian will be here next week. I intend her to remain here with her nurse, as, of course, I shall now be as much at Abbots Thorpe as in London."

"You will find the cottage very small if you bring many servants," replied Meta. "Mr. Gorton, I fancy, could not breathe in those small rooms."

"I delight in them. There is so much freedom in a small establishment. You may be sure I shall only bring a necessary staff. We all, more or less I fancy, delight in throwing off state and grandeur to become semi-nomadic. I suppose it is the force of nature, strong within us, to enjoy for a time a primitive mode of existence rather than the settled habits of refined life."

"I like it, because I am accustomed to simplicity, and should be sadly out of my element in what you term 'refined life.' But then I am only a farmer*ess*, so what *could* you expect?" said Meta with mock humility, and a flush which told volumes of yet unsubdued pride.

Hugh wondered if he had said anything wrong,

and flushed also with a sense of shame, lest his remark had been mistaken by Meta for mock humility. "Riches bring many small thorns, as well as that Damocles sword 'responsibility,' to hang perpetually above one's head," he thought, as in silence they walked on.

"You have taken the Southwoods' cottage, I hear, for two years," said Meta at length.

"Yes; I thought by that time I should have rebuilt Abbots Thorpe, and carried out my 'restitution' scheme. I am thankful to say I find affairs are not so bad after all at Abbots Thorpe, and that poor Harcourt has not involved the estate to the extent I at first imagined. He appears to have squandered his wife's money more than his own. I do not think, with every care, we shall be able to save more than eight hundred a year from the wreck of her once splendid fortune."

"I am delighted to think she will have that sum. Gertrude believes she will only have about four hundred a year to live upon, but she tells me she never knew the amount of fortune she originally possessed."

"And I should not wish to enlighten her—it was immense; the Glenmores have lived upon it ever since she was an infant. It is certainly one of the darkest pages in their extraordinary history."

By this time they had reached the common, and were close to Meta's farm, with its neatly stacked hay, sunny garden, and noisy yard.

"I cannot ask you in to-day, Mr. Ethelstone. Already I have been too long away from Gertrude.

Good-bye! I suppose you leave for London to-morrow."

"Yes, I believe so," he replied, with corresponding coldness, for he felt freezed by Meta's manner.

Thus they parted.

Meta hastened to her own room, threw off her bonnet, and cast herself weeping upon the bed.

"Why am I so foolish? Why cannot I behave to him as a friend—a mere acquaintance, instead of piquing his vanity by my pettishness, which only reveals my secret the more plainly, when I am only anxious to convince him I am indifferent either to his love or hate? Oh! that speech of his, how it rankled! Truly, riches and excessive prosperity rarely improve the character! But he shall never condescend to *me*, Meta Raycliffe—no! I would rather die than let him think I love him now."

Gradually her thoughts reverted to bygone days, and she lived over again those miserable hours when she first knew he had been false to her, and left her, tortured with her yet unconquered love. She recalled the quenching of this love, which, with frantic grief, she knew had become unholy, and the sympathy and pity which had taken its place when he lost his lovely, gentle wife.

"And all this for one who cares not whether I live or die! And yet I let him hold my destiny, my happiness, in his hand."

And Hugh! what were his feelings as he strode rapidly over the common and down the hill to Abbots Thorpe?

He suffered cruelly, but did not, because he would

not, analyse his feelings. He loved Meta, but would not confess the fact; hence all his misery, and hers too. He imagined it would be an indignity to the memory of his wife if he married again, and dreaded what he considered callous insensibility to her loss, making constant efforts to renew his first bitter anguish at the time of her death. But this morbid state was soon to yield to more healthful feeling. He had just reached the gate at Holmlee, and was leaning over it, dreaming of "love, life, and all things," when he was accosted by the detective, Brownlow Rigg.

"Pardon me, sir, but I have been seeking you everywhere. We have gained a slight clue to the man Trapps, and I wished to inform you of the fact. An exploring party have been to the 'Devil's Dyke,' and traced footsteps. They also found this leather bag, containing sovereigns and a diamond brooch, which you may recognise. I have them both here, sir."

"I am returning home," replied Hugh; "meet me there in half an hour."

"I will, sir." The man touched his hat respectfully and turned away.

Hugh tingled with excitement. What if Trapps were found? But if he had secreted himself in the Devil's Dyke he had surely left it long ago?

Hugh returned home and waited impatiently for Brownlow Rigg. At last he came.

"This is the bag, and here is the brooch, sir," said the man, placing them before Hugh upon the table.

"That brooch, or rather pin, was my grandfather's; he wore it frequently; I could swear to it. It was his favourite pin, on account of the great beauty of the large centre diamond."

"Then we have him at last, either dead or alive," said Brownlow Rigg with a flashing eye. "He's given me trouble enough, and if I find him, I'll take good care he does not slip through my fingers."

"Of course you will search the cavern," said Hugh; "not that I think you will find him there, but it may lead to some further clue, and you will have discharged your duty."

"Yes, sir; I, Bill Sykes, and a guide are going to-morrow."

"Thomas Rymer is your best guide—he knows every turn in the cavern."

"So I heard, sir, and I thought of asking him, only his lameness is against him."

"Not in the least. He will direct us, and point out the road."

"Then *you* intend to go, sir?" said Brownlow Rigg in surprise.

"Yes, certainly. Take care you have plenty of lanterns and ropes. I will see Rymer, and we will meet you at the mouth of the cavern exactly at nine to-morrow morning. Good evening, Mr. Rigg."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The following morning, exactly at nine, Hugh and Thomas Rymer met Brownlow Rigg, Bill Sykes, his subordinate, and "Long-legged Jim," the guide, at the mouth of the popularly called "Devil's Dyke Cavern." It was situated about five miles from Abbots Thorpe, and appeared to have been a subterranean passage leading to the sea, doubtless in former days made use of for contraband purposes. It was of great length, and was invested by popular credulity with many curious traditions, children and superstitious individuals being at all times careful to avoid it.

The only persons supposed to know its intricate windings were Thomas Rymer (who in his youth was the village "dare-devil") and Long-legged Jim, a half-witted man, who lived in a small hut in the immediate neighbourhood, and earned a scanty livelihood by carrying a flambeau before curious visitors intent upon viewing the stalactites which adorned the roof, and a petrified pope, witch, and dog; the latter two said to be familiar spirits, caught by a holy man of God, and immured there to petrify beneath the perpetual droppings of water from the roof above.

The flambeaux were lighted, and the party prepared to enter.

"The gentleman as we go to seek mun be dead long afore now," remarked Long-legged Jim, who was a grotesque-looking individual, with a very short body, upon legs which resembled stilts, and an unprepossessing glide in his eye; "I fund this hat after t' party left that day."

"Which hat?" inquired Hugh.

"This un as I've got on my yed to be sure. I fund it, and he as finds 'as best reet to wear, I take it."

"You had no business to take it. Pull it off, and let us examine it," said Mr. Rigg, angrily.

He took it off, and the man examined it well. At length he turned up the lining, and read, "John Trapps, May 12th, 18—."

"Sure enough we have him! Look, sir! look, sir! here's his name." Hugh flushed, and for the moment felt too excited to speak.

What if they found him alive? Would Hugh's tingling fingers let the law take its course? Or would the first sight of the fellow cause him to fall upon him and thrash him within an inch of his life?

To these questions he gave no answer, but left his actions free to the wind of chance, a course very generally adopted when passion clashes with reason.

"Bill," said Mr. Rigg, "this isn't a pleasant business; s'pose you and I stop here and take a mouthful of something to keep up our courage, and warm the cockles of our 'arts."

"Done to that, and no mistake, Mr. Rigg! Let us drink to the health of Squire Ethelstone, and

may he get t' little one as stole the Will into his clutch, and a right tight one I know it will be from t' look of his face."

Hugh and Thomas Rymer had gone on, thus giving the opportunity for fortification, which now made its appearance in the shape of a flask containing brandy, and *perhaps* water. Brownlow Rigg was perpetually athirst, and "something to drink" was as necessary to his state of efficiency as the air he breathed. He took a great "pull" at the flask, and then, a refreshed Goliath, followed the rest of the party.

"We had better keep together, Mr. Rigg," said Hugh, sternly.

"Holloa! what's this?" asked Bill Sykes, trembling visibly in the knees.

"Only the bats, man," replied Thomas Rymer, with a contemptuous smile. "You chicken-hearted fellow! you'd better go back and suck goose's milk than stay here!"

"Well, I'm willing to light you—hold the flambeau—but I don't see as how I am called upon to do more," he sullenly remarked.

"Mr. Rigg, I trusted to you to bring a man, and not an ass," said Hugh. "Leave him; let him remain behind; he will be useless to us when the real danger of exploring commences. And now, Mr. Rigg, I wish to know if you intend to do your duty regardless of consequences; if so, follow me."

Brownlow Rigg was not the man to fear, especially after brandy; so, with an oath, which Hugh at that moment refrained from rebuking, he declared

his resolution to follow the squire to the end of the world, if needs be.

They proceeded about thirty yards over the wet, slimy ground, with the water dripping upon them from above, until they found the passage gradually narrowing and lowering around them. At length it was so confined in some parts that they were compelled to creep along on their hands and knees.

"Rymer, you must remain here," at length said Hugh, as he found the difficulties of their position increasing every step he took.

"And why proceed farther?" he asked. "I know the cowardice of Mr. Trapps too well to believe he would risk his life in this dreadful place."

"Now just wait a bit, Master Hugh, and don't be impatient," replied Thomas, encouragingly; "I know every inch of this ground. There, take that turn to your left, and take care not to slip into the 'black pool of death.' We are just upon it; it's railed off, but still there's danger; you might slip beneath t' rail, and then, I take it, we'd have seen the last of your kind face, sir."

"Ay; it's close to t' witch and t' dog," remarked Long-legged Jim. "There's been many a foul deed done down there," he added.

"They lighted candles, and left Thomas Rymer with his flambeau, as it was impossible for him to proceed farther on account of his lameness. He, however, directed them, and explained all the windings so clearly, Hugh felt he should have comparatively little difficulty in prosecuting his search.

"Jim," said Thomas Rymer, "you know the

'grand chamber?' go there first, and look well into all the 'apostles' niches,'—he may be hiding in one on 'em."

Jim replied with a grin, and a knowing shake of the head. They kept to the left, until it appeared they could go no farther. "This is the end," said Hugh, in a disappointed tone. "What folly to come! Trapps was not likely to be found here—I might have known that."

"Nay, nay, sir, this isn't t' end. Look here at t' hoile," said Jim, drawing Hugh's attention to an aperture through which a man might creep with difficulty. Hugh held his light stretched out before him, and did not hesitate to crawl in with his face to the ground, and in that position dragged himself along until the passage opened into an apartment of large dimensions, with curious niches on one side, which he found on examination were smaller caverns, or passages, leading he knew not whither, and from their number, twelve, termed "the apostles."

The floor and roof were covered with stalagmites and stalactites, which in some places assumed hideous forms, and, to a heated imagination, might suggest the thought of the wicked genius of the spot turning every one who invaded his territory into human petrifactions.

Hugh set down his light, and rested till he was rejoined by Brownlow Rigg and the guide.

"It is evident we can advance no farther unless we explore those caverns, which are not tempting," said Hugh, in a tone of vexation, as he thought of his own credulity.

"Well, sir, it is very extraordinary—I can't make it out! Look, sir, what Jim picked up after you left us." It was a leathern bag containing money, similar to the one previously found.

"Well! and bless my soul if there isn't a shoe here!" said Mr. Rigg, searching around with his light close to the ground.

There it certainly was, and Hugh was completely mystified. He did not like the idea of giving up the search, but was at a loss how to prosecute it further.

"What object could bring Trapps here, Mr. Rigg?" he asked.

"A very plain one, I take it, sir," answered the detective. "He knew the police were on his heels, and didn't know where to fly for safety, when he suddenly, I don't doubt, remembered this cavern, and thought he could escape from it more readily than from any other place."

"Then what fools we are to seek him here, if we believe he has escaped."

"Jim says he knows the man couldn't escape, there is no outlet; once in this place without a guide, and you are done—given up to petrifaction, Jim says, till the day of judgment."

"But Trapps had not the courage to face the horrors of this cavern alone; I know his cowardice too well to believe it."

"Perhaps, sir, he liked it better than the gallows which waited for him. He knew Lantelli, his chum (as wicked a scoundrel as ever swung), was taken up, and he well knew the fellow would confess all, and

implicate him. Anything is better than hanging, sir."

"Still I doubt the fact of Trapps venturing here alone. But as you have found that shoe we will explore a little farther."

As Hugh spoke his eye was attracted by a heap of stones, which appeared to have been partially removed, and disclosed an opening in the rock.

"There's a passage, sir, as I live, which a man might squeeze through," said Mr. Rigg, in a high state of glee. "Five hundred pounds isn't to be had every day, and if I find him, dead or alive, I am to have that sum. I'm for going in here to try my luck."

"Evidently the passage leads somewhere; I have often heard this cavern had an outlet to the shore," replied Hugh.

"It's general belief, sir. Mr. Trapps know'd it, or," said Jim, with an ugly leer, "he never would 'a ventured 'is waluable body in these here parts."

Mr. Rigg disappeared through the opening. In a short time he sounded his bugle joyfully. Hugh prepared to follow, and commanded the guide to remain where he was, and sound his horn every few moments, so that when they wished to return they might be certain of the passage.

It required an immense effort to squeeze himself through the aperture, and every now and then his shoulders were jammed between protruding rocks. At length, after many successive efforts, he found the passage widened, and in a few moments he came out into a rocky cave, of large dimensions, at the farther end of which he heard the ocean waves gently

rippling, one after another. The stalactites here were magnificent, and the dripping of the cold drops into the pools of water on the ground sent a chill through Hugh's frame. In a few moments he perceived Mr. Rigg, who was brandishing his flambeau above his head in a wild state of excitement.

"He's here! he's here!" he cried. "Can you come, sir?"

Mr. Rigg was neither religious nor particular, so expressed his joy in a round of oaths which I feel no inclination to transcribe.

Hugh was appalled! There, by the light of Mr. Rigg's flambeau, which he seemed to take a delight in flourishing so that its glare might fall best upon the hideous object, sat Mr. Trapps on the ledge of a high jutting rock, the top of which formed a canopy over his head, and from which the petrifying water dripped ceaselessly upon his poor bald pate.

Hugh was too horrified to speak for some seconds.

"He's there, precious scoundrel, and I have him. The reward says either dead or alive—yours in particular, sir. Why, bless my soul, if here isn't another leather bag, the father of all the little ones! It has a hole in it, and that accounts for his dropping all them little purses as he went along."

But Hugh's eyes were riveted upon the horrid figure, and—shall we not confess the fact?—anger and detestation of the man had given place to intense pity as he looked at the stiffened figure, and realised in some measure the awful sensations of Mr. Trapps, as, hour after hour, he found his chance

of escape less and less, and at last was driven by the relentless sea, wave after wave, higher and higher up into the fissures of the rock, till he could climb no higher, but was compelled to sit there, in agony inexpressible, waiting for the ebbing of the tide.

It was evident to Hugh that Trapps would have to sit there for a length of time before the receding of the waters, as from the sea-mark he could perceive the height to which they rose. During that agonising period doubtless his limbs had become numbed with the constant dripping of those cold, cold drops; exhaustion had supervened, rendering him, after the ebbing of the tide, powerless to leave his living tomb.

"What is to be done?" asked Hugh, whilst his heart beat audibly, and he felt the hot blood surging to his brain.

"I don't know, sir. It seems impossible to get at him. The tide is coming up fast, and if we don't very soon return the way we came, we shall, I take it, find ourselves in the same fix."

At this moment Jim appeared through the passage. He had grown too tired of waiting in the cavern to remember Hugh's orders. Mr. Rigg hailed him with a shout of joy.

Jim soon saw the position of affairs, and offered to climb the rock and throw "the gentleman" over the ledge into the cave beneath.

Hugh would not hear of this, but proposed that a rope should be procured, tied round his body, and that he should be let down, provided Mr. Rigg and Jim would promise to have him buried afterwards.

"There are so many difficulties in the way, I just think," said Mr. Rigg, scratching his head doubtingly, "that all we can do, under his very peculiar circumstances, will be to leave him where he is—a warning to future generations. We are three, and can swear to all particlers. The Squire of Abbots Thorpe's word is good to pass many a more wonderful story than this," he added, taking off his hat, and bowing low to Hugh.

"Your proposition is the best, Mr. Rigg. We can do no more; he is dead, and justice—nay, the spirit of revenge, may even be satisfied with the horrors heaped upon his guilty head."

Hugh turned to give one more look at the wretched man, with his bleached face and awful eyes—a sight he never forgot—and then retraced his way, followed by Brownlow Rigg and Long-legged Jim.

It was with a sensation of relief that he found himself once more by the side of his kind old friend, who patiently sat where they had left him, brandishing his flambeau to pass the weary time away.

Brownlow Rigg had descriptive talent to a marvellous extent, and very soon gratified the curiosity of Thomas Rymer; indeed, the subject of that adventure would be his intellectual food for many a long day to come.

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Mr. Rigg of course claimed the reward from government, and also from the Squire of Abbots Thorpe.

The cavern was visited by numbers, and Long-legged Jim was enabled to leave his tumble-down hut for the substantial cottage which he built close to the mouth of the cave. He deserved encouragement from those whose morbid taste led them to explore that fearful cavern in order to feast their eyes upon an object so revolting as poor Mr. Trapps undergoing the process of petrifaction, and sitting for ever and for ever upon the jutting rock, waiting for that day when the wicked shall call upon the rocks to hide them from the fierce anger of Him who comes to judge both quick and dead.

* * * * * *

Hugh returned to his little parlour, care-worn and weary. The fate of Trapps had impressed him deeply, and it was some time before he could recover from the shock he had received.

It was in vain he tried to turn his thoughts to happier subjects. At night, when he closed his eyes to sleep, he awoke with a start, feeling only the nightmare of Mr. Trapps's bleached face and fearful eyes closing over him—nearer, nearer!

"This will never do!" he thought, so rose, dressed, and quietly leaving the house, sauntered by the pale moonlight to his wife's grave.

How inexpressibly calm and lovely was the scene! Moon and stars looking down out of the deep blue sky upon those silent graves, and bathing the old church, which stood there a witness to man's faith in Him who made the firmament and all things! Stupendous thought! that they who lie so still

beneath our feet, with the sun, the moon, the rain, and wind alternately passing over their silent graves, have entered upon Eternity and seen God! *Their* earthly glass, through which they saw darkly, has been removed, and even as the careless passers-by hurry on to business or pleasure, *they* are living intelligences, gazing perhaps through eternity, with their perceptions perfected, upon those things which eye hath not seen nor heart of man conceived. Hugh thought this, and felt awed.

He knelt by Marian's grave, and a prayer rose to his lips. Gradually his feelings were calmed, and he could think practically upon the future and its many responsibilities. Then thoughts of Meta filled his mind, and he remembered Marian's strongly expressed wish upon her death-bed that he should make amends for past unkindness and marry her. A veil seemed suddenly to rise from before his eyes, and he perceived that what he had hitherto shrunk from as an outrage to the memory of his wife, was the course she herself would advise him to pursue. Where could he find one who would be more of a mother to his child than Meta? Her goodness, her practical sense, and her affectionate heart had stood every test. He loved her too, dearly loved her! But did she love him? The doubt arose. But he thought over all that had passed between them, and arrived at a correct and happy conclusion. Then the curse? What of that? Surely it would not now come nigh his home! No, Marian's child, a girl, the first female born to an Ethelstone for generations, reassured him on that

point. God was just; and Hugh had a heart bent upon right, and was ready to make "restitution" to the utmost of his ability—a work he had already set about.

So it was with a lightened heart he cast one more reverential glance upon the grave of his angel wife ere he turned to leave the sacred precincts. He had made up his mind to see Meta before he returned to London, ask her to forgive the past, and be his wife.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

We are too apt to consider "health" the greatest blessing we possess, and sickness the greatest evil. But ah! how often is the long illness a healing balsam, under whose benign influence the weary struggling soul finds rest and emancipation from the cares, yea, the sorrows of life! Truly Solomon was never ill, or he would surely have added sickness to the many other things which he enumerated as blessings!

So thought Gertrude, as she sat at the window, gazing on the scene before her, and watching for Meta's light form and sunny face to appear.

At last she came. But with such a saddened look upon her usually bright face, Gertrude felt concerned, and longed to ask the cause of her sorrow.

"I hope she and Hugh have not parted coldly again," she thought. Gertrude left her seat and went to seek Meta, but found she had gone to her own room, and as the door was shut she did not venture to intrude, but returned to the parlour and read to beguile the time until she appeared. Had she known that poor Meta was even then lying

upon her bed, given up to sorrow which she never breathed to mortal, how her heart would have yearned for her! and what ready sympathy could she have given her friend! But on this subject Meta must be silent; for who could understand her mingled feelings of pride, disappointment, and love.

How true is it that our daily familiar life, our words and trivial deeds, often hide the secret grief or joy which lies beneath the calm exterior; and that those of our own household are very generally strangers to the depths of that human soul within us full of unuttered thought, good and evil!

How interesting, how lovely Gertrude looked in her deep crape and widow's cap! Truly, in her brightest and most brilliant triumphs in society she had never looked so indescribably beautiful and attractive as now. Her graceful form was slightly bent as if with care, depriving it of much of that hauteur which it once possessed. Now Gertrude's head was bent in humility, like a meek St. Cecilia's, instead of being thrown back in supercilious pride. The lovely oval of her face, too, was seen to much advantage in the close muslin cap, covering, but not concealing, the rich masses of her glossy hair, drawn back and rolled behind her exquisitely shaped head. But it was not Gertrude's appearance, or the dazzling fairness of her neck, face, and hands, which charmed you now, for these were lost sight of in the mild and lovely seriousness which rested upon her fine, noble countenance, softening every feature with its refining touch, and elevating the expression to one of saintlike purity and peace.

Sorrow and sickness had been the hot furnace through which Gertrude's soul had had to pass; but the effect was lovely, and she came forth out of the Refiner's hand purified from the dross of worldliness, and ready, yea, anxious to devote herself entirely to the ministration of good works. Such, indeed, had now become her prayerful determination. The world had no charms for her; her life was a waste and barren tract where all the waters were bitter; and she had decided never more to take part in the gay and giddy scenes of fashionable life.

At length Meta came. Gertrude saw she had been weeping, but made no remark upon it as she rose to meet her, and give her the usual welcoming kiss.

"I am so pleased to see you," she said, winding her arm gently round her waist, as she looked beamingly into her face, and gave her another kiss.

"You are always kind, dear Gertrude," she replied, "but my conscience tells me I have left you far too long alone to-day. I hope you have not missed me very, very much."

"That I have; but I knew you would not stay away longer than you could help, so that consoled me. I had a pleasant book, too, and my thoughts gave me full occupation."

"We will have tea," said Meta, drawing up the blinds to the top of every window, and arranging the room to give it a greater air of comfort and cheerfulness. "You wanted me here, Gerty; how dull you were, almost in darkness. Dickey thought it was bedtime, and has gone to roost," said she,

carrying the cage to the open window, and leaving him there to plume himself in the sun.

"I have news for you, Gerty; guess what it is?"

"Well! Patty Steadman's babes—one, two, three—have arrived," replied Gertrude, with a smile, and a little touch of the humour of former days.

"No, not yet!" laughed Meta; "something better than that. Lord Lilsdale is married! I have a long letter from him by to-day's post, announcing the fact, and giving me an enthusiastic description of his wife's charms. They are to be at Ashley Court in another month; and he wishes me to take a general survey over the establishment before they return. Oh! I am so glad he has found a nice wife, for he thoroughly deserves one. He has indeed been my best friend in adversity, and showered kindnesses upon me which I can never repay. I do hope Lady Lilsdale will like me!"

"It is to be hoped so; but, Meta, I trust none of her *friends* will tell her Lord Lilsdale admired you, and that you refused him."

Meta blushed deeply. "Oh, Gerty! don't allude to that, it always pains me so deeply. You can never know what sad feelings are connected with that period of my life! There is no fear, however, of making Lady Lilsdale jealous, for her husband is evidently devotedly attached to her; and he informs me in his letter that he told all about it before they were married; and that his wife is bent upon having me for one of her intimate friends. He concludes by saying he is quite sure that his wife and I shall like each other extremely."

"She is certain to like, nay, love you, Meta; how could she help it?" added Gertrude, with an affectionate glance, and a tear in her eye, as she thought of Meta's loveliness of disposition, and recalled her goodness to herself. "I had a letter, too, from Harry Verner, Meta. He sends endless messages to you, and says he thinks of purchasing a small estate somewhere near Abbots Thorpe, as he is to be married to Annette next spring, and he thinks we should form an agreeable colony altogether. And so you will, dear Meta. I see a bright, a happy future in store for you, and my other friends, and I thank God for it. But I, dearest, best of earthly friends," said Gertrude, with swimming eyes, as she took Meta's hand between hers, "I must bid adieu to this spot. Already I have encroached too long upon your hospitality, time, and patience. Next week, Meta, I shall have to bid adieu to all I now hold dear upon earth. You—you are my only earthly friend, except Mr. Ellerton and Harry Verner."

"Won't you add Mr. Ethelstone," asked Meta with a blush; "surely he is also your friend."

"That he is, and he has proved himself to be the noble-minded man I have always understood him to be. I am indeed blessed in having so many kind friends raised up to me at a time when I most required sympathy and love," she added tearfully.

Meta wept too. "Gertrude, this is all nonsense. Why should you think of leaving me? Live with me always, unless indeed my humble home is too poor, too——"

"Oh, Meta! do not say that. I have had more

peace, more true joy beneath your roof, than I ever knew before. But it cannot be. I feel to remain longer your guest would be unreasonable. And, Meta, my mind is changed: I have determined to devote my life to the service of God, to quit the world for ever, and to join some sisterhood of pious Protestant women, who will help me to be steadfast in the course I have entered upon."

"Join a sisterhood!" said Meta, shocked at the unaccustomed word. "Why should you do that? Your views are not sufficiently 'High Church,' dear Gertrude, to find happiness in such a course. I have heard that these sisterhoods are semi-Romish affairs, and that a sincere Protestant mind cannot find sympathy in them."

"Mr. Ellerton has founded one in his parish upon the strict broad principles of the English Church, and that is the one I intend to join."

"Oh! dear Gerty! don't—don't think of carrying out this idea! Wait a little, you are not strong yet, and remain with me this one winter; then in the spring, if you should still feel the same, you will be stronger and better able to carry out your intention."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times, dear Meta, it will indeed be a hard trial to part from you, but I feel it is the best. I am not—I cannot be liked here, you know" (Gertrude sobbed convulsively); "the Glenmore name is hated at Abbots Thorpe, and I never could go to church or into the village without feeling like a culprit, and could not raise my eyes for the shame which would suffuse my cheeks. Oh! after those fearful revelations in all the papers I feel

as if I could never face the world again, especially at Abbots Thorpe."

"Oh, you must not think thus! Everybody loves you! How could you help things being as they were? People know you have been a victim to circumstances, and have had neither part nor lot in anything which has transpired. Stay, dear Gerty, stay with me, and be my friend, my joy. What shall I do without you? you are necessary to my happiness, and when you are gone I shall be very lonely. Let us be sisters, and live together always."

"Would that I could deem such a course right, dear Meta—then I should delight in the plan you suggest. But to be a burthen upon those I love, and to live a life of luxurious idleness, would scarcely be trying to redeem the past. No, dearest Meta, my mind is quite made up. I am getting strong and well, I have no earthly tie, and only the remembrance of past sorrow to dwell upon, and lead me

'Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee.
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!

'There let my way appear,
Steps unto Heaven;
All that Thou sendest me,
In mercy given;
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!

'Then with my waking thoughts,
Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs,
Bethel I'll raise;
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!'"

Gertrude finished the verses with a solemn "Amen," and in silence they sat then awhile together looking into each other's face.

Then Meta clasped her arms around Gertrude, and with the large tears streaming from her honest eyes, said, "Gertrude, I yield the point—do as you will, but ever remember that here, in joy, in sorrow, in sickness, or in health, as long as I live and have a roof over my head, you have a sister who loves you truly, and a home to come to whenever you wish. One only request I make, that you will remain with me until next spring. By that time Mr. Ethelstone will have settled all your affairs, and you will be in a better and more independent position to take the course you have decided upon. Besides, I cannot part with you yet," she added, holding Gertrude's slight form to her breast with a heartfelt embrace.

"Meta, I will do as you wish. I will remain the winter. Bless you, bless you, my more than friend," she said, as with a tearful kiss she gently disengaged herself from her embrace, and turned to leave the room in order to weep her grateful tears unseen.

Two days after this conversation, Meta had letters to post. She would take them herself, and on her return would call upon Nancy Rymer, who had not been very well lately.

It was the end of August. A second summer appeared to have set in, and Meta thought she had never seen so lovely a day. Nature was joyous, and everybody she met looked bright and cheerful, bathed in the golden light of that glorious sun! Meta also felt a buoyant courage to meet the future, and a pleasant sense of enjoyment of life which surprised her, after the cold crushing weight of despondency which had oppressed her during the last few days. She had posted her letters, sat half-an-hour with Nancy, whom she persuaded to eat the delicate morsel she had prepared to tempt her sickly appetite, much to the delight of Thomas, who really thought his Nancy was going to die, because neither "bit nor sup" had passed her lips for two days. Meta, however, had a way of her own in managing refractory invalids, and always succeeded in gaining them over to think all she said and did must be right. So Nancy very soon yielded her obstinacy to Meta's gentle, but all-powerful influence.

Of course Thomas could talk of nothing except the wonderful adventure in the cavern, and the discovery of Mr. Trapps. Meta had heard the news, but not the particulars, so was glad to hear all Thomas had to say. "But surely Master Hugh has told you all?" said Thomas; "and maybe it's all old news."

"I have not seen Mr. Ethelstone since," replied Meta with a slight blush.

"He's off to London to-morrow to fetch t' little one, and will be away a month, I heard him say. Holmlee is to be made ready for Mr. Gorton. They are making great preparations and improvements

there. They are doing away with all t' new-fangled trumpery, and restoring it to what it was in the grand days of your ancestors, Miss Meta—the proud Raycliffes. Ay, surely all things will be righted now, and before I die I shall see Abbots Thorpe and Holmlee great and grand as they ought to be, and united, made friends, with no more cursing or bitterness between them. Oh, Miss Meta! the day we see you and our dear squire united in t' holy bonds, will be a happy one for all!—it's what all on us pray may come to pass very soon."

Imagine Meta's dismay!

There, in the doorway, stood Hugh! He had flushed to the very roots of his hair, but a beaming smile radiated his manly face. Slightly embarrassed he certainly was, but all his coldness had given place to his usual genial manner.

Meta, however, could not recover from the shock her pride had sustained; so, hastily bidding adieu to Thomas and Nancy, she bowed stifly to Hugh, and left the cottage.

Down the village, past the Rectory, without even a thought of her kind friends the Leslies, and by the churchyard, where the dark trees threw their long shadows over the graves of Hugh's wife and Harcourt Glenmore; through the green lane, with only the noise of the lazy waves murmuring over the rippled beach to break the silence of the spot, and up to the old gateway of Holmlee. What a change there! The workmen are busy pulling down and putting up, for Miles Gorton has a crotchet, which is, that the little Reginald Ray-

cliffe shall only know Holmlee as it was in the palmy days of his forefathers. The old place is to be restored and refurnished, very much in the style of former days. Meta scarcely, however, observes the change, but hurries on to seek the shelter of "home," all her pride and indignation aroused by the ill-judged though kindly-meant speech of Thomas Rymer. "To think *he* should have heard it," was the one thought which flushed her cheek and lent swiftness to her feet. She had proceeded far up the hill to a point which commanded a fine view of Abbot's Thorpe and Holmlee, when she turned to gaze upon the ruins of the once magnificent house.

"How daylight changes the aspect of everything, Miss Raycliffe!" said a voice behind her. She knew the voice well, for had not its music thrilled her many a time and oft? It was Hugh's, who had taken a short cut across the fields in order to overtake her.

"Yes, it does indeed, Mr. Ethelstone," she replied; "daylight fills us with the reality of our existence, we see things as they are; whilst night presses upon our imagination, and the forms things take then are often unnatural and exaggerated."

"Just so, in one sense," he replied, "but not in another; for instance, the man who looks with horror upon the raging flames devouring his house and home in the dead of night, does not experience half the sense of utter misery which seizes him the following day, when he gazes upon the ruins lying blackened and smouldering in the bright unsympathising sun."

"You do not look very miserable now," replied Meta shortly, as she gazed at Hugh's bright face; "circumstances do not appear to have affected your spirits very much, which is a good thing, considering that sensitive feeling of any kind is not conducive to happiness."

"Oh, Meta! why are you so changed, so unkind to me since——" he stopped, he was going to say since his lost inheritance had been restored to him, but he hesitated.

"Am I unkind and changed? I was not conscious of the fact! Doubtless it is age—old age—which is making me disagreeable. I shall be five-and-twenty next month."

"That speech is not like your own self," replied Hugh. "Oh, Meta! be as you once were, and check this temper which is gradually gaining an ascendency over you!"

"Mentor is too moralising this morning! Egotistical philosophy is quite beyond my powers of comprehension; so I will bid you adieu, having no time to lose." Meta spoke in hot haste. Hugh's coolness annoyed her, when she remembered how much she had suffered for him. She walked hastily on, tearfully, and with a quivering lip, whilst every limb shook with emotion.

Hugh soon overtook her; he could not bear the thought of parting thus. He forgot everything except his love for Meta. He had seen the tear in her eye as she turned so angrily from him, and he thought he knew why it glistened there. His whole nature was roused by her grief, and though she had

chilled him by her manner for a brief space, he felt that nothing now should prevent his speaking.

"Listen to me, Meta! you must listen to me!" he said in a low, concentrated voice, which spoke out of the deep passion of his being. "I love you with all my life and strength; you are dearer to me than anything in the world. Oh! can you forget and forgive the past? Did you know all, you would. Oh, Meta! you cannot know how much suffering you are causing me!"

"And how much have *you* caused me, Hugh?" she asked tearfully; for all her pride and coldness vanished beneath his eyes beaming so tenderly upon her.

"I have—I know I have! Bless you, dear Meta, for those words! they inspire me with hope. A horrid dread was creeping over me, and I began to fancy you hated me. Oh, Meta! if a lifetime of devotion will atone for the past, you shall have it; but you must, you shall know you are dearer to me than all the world beside!" He spoke rapidly, the blood rushing tumultuously to his face as he sprang to Meta's side, who stood with drooping head and tearful eyes beneath the shade of a tree, unable to utter a word.

"Meta, Meta! say you love me! Marian smiles upon us; she told me with her dying breath she would bless our union, and be the guardian angel of our wedded lives. Say—say you love me, forgive the past, and will be my wife! I love you best, and before all! Oh, Meta! you must, you shall believe me!"

Meta raised her eyes to his with a deep blush, softly replying, "God bless our union! May I be a help *meet* for you, dear Hugh!"

He had conquered! Victory was won, and Meta —his tried, his faithful Meta—was his own. His arm was around her waist, and he gazed upon her face with manly tenderness.

"Ah!" said Meta, an hour later, as she raised her happy face to Hugh's; "it is strong characters, such as yours, which love most deeply and most faithfully. May I be to you and your motherless babe all you think I shall be, and all that your angel wife would wish me to be. Then we shall meet without fear of reproach before the Great Throne, to spend our eternity in endless and unparting love!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Hugh urged Meta not to delay their marriage until Abbots Thorpe was rebuilt. There was no cause for delay. Two years had elapsed since Marian's death, and he could carry out his "restitution" scheme far better with Meta by his side than whilst constantly longing for her to be there. Mr. Gorton, too, urged their early union, on account of Hugh's little motherless girl, who now required more than a nurse's care.

But Meta would not hear of marriage at present; she wished three years to elapse from the time of Marian's death before Hugh took unto himself another wife; so proposed that the little Marian should at once be placed under her care, in order that she might learn to love her as a mother. Hugh and Mr. Gorton consented to this, and the little Marian and Reginald Raycliffe became companions at Ashlee farm.

In the mean time Hugh was fully occupied. As squire of Abbots Thorpe he had much to do; but when to that was added the business of an election (for of course he must be returned the first opportunity as member for the county), the supervision of

the great firm of Miles Gorton and Co., the rebuilding of Abbot's Thorpe, and the carrying out of his "restitution" scheme, we may well imagine that our hero had very little time to spend in the enjoyment of Meta's society or in recreation. How he longed for her in the midst of his business and troubles! Her practical, energetic mind, however, did him good service, for she helped him amazingly with his correspondence, and in his plans connected with the scheme of restitution.

Society always discovers virtue in a rich man, but rarely appreciates the value of a poor one. Society goes upon sight, and not upon faith. She has no time to inquire into the moral and intellectual worth of virtuous poverty, so fastens upon the tangible. She can see your status, your equipages, your luxurious home; therefore you are a great man, and talented, whose name and influence is eagerly sought by society, politicians, and pietists. Grow rich in a year, give largely in charity, and the next you will assuredly be endowed by the admiring world with all the cardinal virtues which adorn the calendar of saints!

Hugh, the successful, the reinstated Squire of Abbots Thorpe, and the owner of immense possessions, was a very different individual to Hugh the disinherited, in the estimation of society. He was wealthy and powerful, so a proper subject to be petted, courted, admired. Truly, the adulation of the world has made many a wealthy man, in bitterness of thought, realise the fact, "That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven!"—and

understand the prayer, "In all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us!"

But it is time we should now state what Hugh's plans were, and how he fulfilled the vow which he had made during the time of trial, with respect to the inheritance of Abbots Thorpe, should he ever be reinstated as its squire.

First he turned his attention to Abbots Thorpe. The house must be rebuilt, but on a scale of even greater magnificence than before; for Hugh's wealth demanded this. Then the old parish church must be restored, a new vicarage built, schools enlarged, and a church erected as a chapel-of-ease to the over-crowded parish church; and, above all, the alienated tithes must be returned to the church from which they had been wrested. This act of restitution at once raised the income of the living to £800 per annum, instead of £250; so Mr. Leslie became rich, and had no longer to pray by a sick man with his thoughts constantly reverting to his over-worked wife, his pecuniary struggles, his efforts to keep up his position in life, and the butcher's and baker's bills, which ought to have been paid long ago. Oh! who can understand the feelings of that "perpetual curate" as he walks with humble solemnity into the pulpit to preach the glad tidings of good news to his rich congregation, who roll to church in their softly-cushioned carriages, and perhaps think him improvident because he cannot provide for a wife and six children, without falling into debt or starving, upon £250 a year! Ah! I have seen many a noble mind brought to the brink of despair

by such an anomalous position! Judge ye, who fare sumptuously every day, and spend your hundreds upon you know not what, how hard it must be for a man—a born gentleman—to live, nay exist, and keep his wife, a gentlewoman too, and their six children, who require food, education, and shoes, upon such a sum. Then, too, you must remember that every needy man in his parish deems his clergyman rich, and demands help from him as his right; and that every rich man requires that his pastor shall be and act as a gentleman, and his wife, home, and children the models of propriety and Christian perfection. And all this for £250 a year! No wonder men shrink from placing their sons in a position of so much peril in this nineteenth century of luxury, and that the clerical papers constantly declare a lamentable falling off in candidates for ordination.

The book of clerical temptation and difficulty has yet to be written. Would that it might fall into the hands of one who could do justice to the subject, and, by drawing attention to the fact of "clerical destitution," avert the calamity of a deficiency of labourers in the vineyard of the Lord. My poor pen can but protest; would that it were touched with a live coal of eloquence, that it might draw many to think and act in this most momentous matter.

Hugh, however, had seen the "destitution," therefore was prepared to think and act for the benefit of some whose parishes and position were out of all proportion to the incomes they derived from their churches.

He had long ago made up his mind that the law of restitution did not require that he should entirely give up Abbots Thorpe to the Church. No, such a course would simply be ridiculous, and would be accounted the act of a lunatic by the world at large. He adopted a much more rational method. After restoring the tithes to the parish church, he set himself to discover the value of the house and lands at the time they were wrested from the Church by Henry VIII., and given to his ancestor, Hugh Atheling Ethelstone. To a conscientious mind there were many difficulties in the way; but Hugh believed that He who is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, would in mercy accept the honest intention of his heart. This thought encouraged him. The value, then, of the religious house, "Abbots Thorpe," and the lands given with it, he found to be £10,000 in the year 1539, when parliament passed the Act for placing religious houses at the disposal of Henry.

Allowing, then, that the value of money has increased since the sixteenth century six-fold, that would bring up the amount in the present day to £60,000; and that sum Hugh decided upon restoring to the Church, irrespective of the alienated tithes which he had already re-conveyed to the parish church of Abbots Thorpe, and the gift of a new vicarage, schools, and an endowed chapel-of-ease, which was in course of erection at the extremity of the parish. And all this was to be done quietly, and without ostentation. He was a rich man, and could well afford to make restitution, therefore no merit

was due to himself in his own opinion; nay, he thought, with a blush, how little self-denial it was costing him to do an act of justice, and return to God out of his abundance what for generations his family had no right to call their own.

Those fair lands, that beautiful house, gradually rising in stately grandeur above the ruin of the former mansion, might truly now be called his own. And a goodly heritage it was, for the Ethelstones had added field to field through many a long year. Those fields were now Hugh's, because he had paid off the mortgages, fortunately not so heavy as he expected, which Harcourt Glenmore had raised upon them to meet his extravagances.

Harcourt, like many another man, could be careful of his own, but was profoundly oblivious to the interests of others; therefore, no sooner had Trapps enlightened him upon the subject of the missing Will, and convinced him that Abbots Thorpe was Hugh Atheling Ethelstone's, than he set about ruining the inheritance with the curse of mortgage. But this was past; and Hugh could now look with hope upon his property, bought with the fruits of his own industry—for that was the light in which he viewed it—and believe a blessing rested peacefully, where a curse had once lain darkly, upon those lands, and that home of his ancestors, upon which for generations the word "sacrilege" had been written in letters of fire.

He could walk through his lovely park, and hear the wind whispering amid the leaves thoughts of joy and trust, rather than the wail of a dead man's

curse. The voice of birds, the lowing of cattle, the rustle of many an insect's wing, and the silvery trickle from many a dripping fount, spoke strongly to Hugh's now chastened mind of earth's spiritual and material harmonies; whilst he gave glory to Him who was there present to give us all things, and bless us in the giving.

But you wish to know, my reader, after this dull chapter, which shall be as short as possible, how Hugh made over sixty thousand pounds to benefit the Church? I will tell you. He restored it in the form of "endowments" to poor churches in populous places; Mr. Ellerton's parish, and Reginald Raycliffe's forsaken perpetual curacy came in for their share. The world laughed and scoffed at first, at what they termed his Quixotic religion; but when they found that he never named the subject, and gave liberally of his abundance to works of charity, they changed their tone, and decided that wealth and power could not have fallen into better hands, and that a blessing seemed in truth to rest upon his good deeds.

And now, having brought our hero thus far through his trials and temptations, let us leave him for two years. And may "God bless and speed him," as many a poor heart, baffling with hard times, says, whose cake and cruse Hugh daily replenishes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TEN years! How many changes does the great car of time carry forward in its unceasing circle round the world! And in no other quiet nook, perhaps, have so many taken place as at Abbots Thorpe.

Ten years have elapsed since the commencement of this tale, to its conclusion; and Hugh's favourite motto still is, "Energy to work, resolution to be independent, and a spirit above the petty vice of self-exaltation." He has found it has worked well in his own case, so adopts it as a guiding text in life.

It was a glorious day in June. The sun smiled down in cloudless serenity upon the earth. Now he was moving westward in his course, and casting welcome shadows from the tall trees and horse-chesnuts which shaded the dusty road. Abbots Thorpe was in holiday attire, and besides being arrayed in the beautiful garment of early summer, and musical with the harmonious murmur of millions of joyful beings, birds and insects, was gay with arches, evergreens, banners, and music.

Hugh Atheling Ethelstone, the Squire of Abbots

Thorpe, his wife, and infant heir, were momentarily expected to arrive, in order to take possession of their mansion, which now rose, Phœnix-like, a splendid edifice from the ashes of its former ruins.

At length two carriages appeared in sight, and were watched with beating hearts by the expectant multitude, who waited to greet them with a shout of welcome as they entered the village. The park, too, was a scene of festivity. The tenantry were on the lawn, and all the rank, beauty, and fashion of the vicinity were there to do honour to the popular Squire of Abbots Thorpe. Bonfires were prepared, the bells of the now restored ancient tower of the parish church rang out a merry peal, and school children in happy groups dressed in white, bearing garlands, formed a procession, headed by the vicar and churchwardens.

Hugh entered the park gates as lord of all around. With a choking sensation which manliness forbade should rise into a tear, he gazed through the vista of that long avenue of oaks and sycamores opening upon the noble mansion, and now gleaming brightly in the sunshine, a fairer and more princely structure than the ancestral home of his forefathers. And even whilst he gazed, bowing low to the hearty cheers which rang on every side, his happy thoughts reverted to Meta his wife, and child, as the greatest of the many earthly blessings which he possessed.

Meta's sweet face beamed with joy as she leaned back in the carriage, with her baby in her arms, and little Marian sitting by her side, determined that all the homage should be paid to her husband

alone. But this was not to be: shouts, cries, and cheers arose for Meta and the infant heir. Hugh, responding to the call, raised his wife from the seat, and holding up his baby boy, presented him to the crowds which thronged around.

At length the carriage reached the stately entrance. Meta hastily alighted, and carrying her baby, quickly passed through the hall to the nearest quiet room she could find, for she felt overwhelmed with emotion, and must find relief in woman's refuge—"tears." No one intruded upon her, for they knew and appreciated the feelings which had moved her to tears. She paced the room, hugging her child, and laughing and crying alternately, for you know Meta was no heroine, but only an earnest, loving woman—

> "A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food,
> For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
> Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."

She heard the cheers of their tenantry and friends as Hugh addressed them, and touchingly alluded to the strange events of his past life. It was an earnest, manly speech, like himself, full of right feeling, chastened by many sorrows and trials, and expressive of his ardent desire to be a good landlord, a kind and sympathising neighbour, and a true Christian gentleman.

Feasting and hilarity succeeded among the tenantry and villagers, for Hugh had ordered his steward to provide dinners and refreshment of all kinds for them. A select party of intimate and tried friends only remained behind on a visit to Hugh and Meta.

Miles Gorton of course was there, with little Reginald, who was now his adopted son, and lived with him at Holmlee—Reginald's future inheritance, he being the last and, until his father's return home, only representative of the ancient house of Raycliffe.

Miles Gorton yearns for the society of his Marian's best-loved friend, Ellinor, but he will not consent to recall Reginald at present from his self-imposed missionary life. "Roughing it abroad," he said, "would do him good, and rub off all the tinsel of his high-flown, visionary castle-building."

Hugh, however, anticipates his return with delight, as he and Meta constantly receive letters from him which manifest a great and wonderful improvement in thought and feeling upon most subjects. "Practice, not theory," seems now his motto, and his extreme religious views are modified to the sober teaching of the Church Prayer-Book and the Bible, without any undue leaning to the extremes of party.

Hugh, at no distant day, hopes to see Reginald and Ellinor in the beautiful new vicarage he has built; and Meta also dreams of the time when Reginald will be Vicar of Abbots Thorpe, as Mr. Leslie is now on the high road to preferment, having become a prebend of York, and one of the most popular clergymen in the county.

Truly society helps those who are fortunate, and truly pietists seek out the largest loaves and fishes for those who are richest in this world's goods, and least require aid.

When Mr. Leslie was a poor man, no one thought

him a good preacher, no one courted him except those who loved him for his worth's sake, and there were many who did; but when he became a vicar, with means at his command and no butcher's bills unpaid, the clerical world decided he was a man of transcendent ability, and must be preferred to something better.

Rub up your coats then; wear spotless lawn, a glossy hat, and let no one guess your poverty, ye hard-worked perpetual curates, starving upon your pittances, or your chance of success up the clerical ladder will be small indeed! Such is the world—clerical as well as lay!

A month was to be devoted to the "house warming" of Abbots Thorpe. Old friends, rich and poor, were to be gathered together, and in one form or another partake of the squire's hospitality.

Mr. Hobson—Hugh's first and fast friend at the foundry—had returned from Lucerne, reinstated in health, and was an honoured guest at Abbots Thorpe. In fact, not one friend who had aided Hugh in his adversity was forgotten.

Mr. Ellerton and Gertrude too were there. Gertrude took no part in the festivities, but had a suite of rooms appropriated to her use, where she could be as quiet as she liked. She and Meta were sisters in heart and feeling, and Abbots Thorpe, in future, would always be "home" to Gertrude whenever she desired to make it so.

Mr. Ellerton had been preferred to an important living in the South of England. The parochial machinery which he had organised in his former

living in London was continued in all its integrity by his successor, a man of similar views and equal in piety to himself.

Gertrude had now joined the "Protestant Sisters' Home," founded by Mr. Ellerton, and in some measure learnt to forget her own sorrows and embittered life in the comfort and joy she was enabled to administer to the poor of that densely crowded district.

Her holidays are always spent at Abbots Thorpe. Hugh and Meta anticipate the time when Gertrude, having "borne the heat and burthen of the day," will consent to occupy a lovely villa which Hugh has built near his park, and spend her now ample income in the comforts of domestic life, and in the ministration of good deeds in the fast increasing village of Abbots Thorpe.

THE END.

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